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Pollock

Harvest of my years

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## HARVEST OF MY YEARS

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HERB ROTH'S CARTOON

of me at the time I was barred from the theaters of the Messrs. Shubert.

# HARVEST OF MY YEARS

*An Autobiography*

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By CHANNING POLLOCK

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*"Winged time glides on insensibly,  
and deceives us; and there is nothing  
more fleeting than years." . . . OVID*

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY  
INDIANAPOLIS NEW YORK

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
BY THE CORNWALL PRESS, CORNWALL, N. Y.

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To  
A. M. P.





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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE LIKENESS of the author on the jacket of this book is from a pastel portrait made in one sitting by Leonebel Jacobs. The cartoons reproduced inside the covers are by Freuh, Massaguer, Hans Stengel, C. de Fornaro, Boardman Robinson, Ryan Walker and Herb Roth. That by Herb Roth, who illustrated all my articles in *The Green Book Magazine*, was drawn with a pipe-cleaner dipped in ink. Most of these cartoons were published in various newspapers, and that by Boardman Robinson is from an old issue of *The New York Morning Telegraph*. Regrettably, three of the cartoons are by artists who cannot be identified. The others were or are well known in America, and Massaguer is a Cuban of international reputation.

THE AUTHOR

*January 8, 1943.*



## HARVEST OF MY YEARS





## I

### *WE BEGIN WITH A WAR*

**W**E WERE in the plaza—my father and I—when we heard the clatter of horses' hoofs and the rattle of military accouterment. "Ezeta's running away," my father said, and we walked rapidly to the edge of the square facing the White House in San Salvador.

Neither of us was surprised to find a squadron of mounted officers, the pick of the army, neatly uniformed and each with a revolver in holster or hand. Since a week or two after the revolution began, all of the foreign colony in this little Central American republic had known that its president, Carlos Ezeta, had kept a small German freighter anchored at the port to assure his escape. Government bulletins reported continual victories, but only that morning Don Manuel, our landlord, had told us that General Antonio Ezeta was falling back on the capital, and had notified his brother to prepare for defense. "The President won't stay," Don Manuel had predicted. "When Antonio arrives, he'll find the barracks deserted and Carlos headed for San Francisco."

As we stood gaping, Carlos rode into view, attended by two officers; the others closed round him, and the whole squadron galloped noisily down the cobblestoned street. Five minutes later we heard a shot, and saw a lone guard drop to his knees and then forward, face down. "We'd better go home," my father advised. "There's no government now, and won't be until either the federal or the rebel troops arrive. It won't take the populace long to find that out, and then the shooting and looting will begin."

As a matter of fact, there wasn't much of either, and most of what there was took place in what might be described as a spirit of good, clean fun. A block or two from the plaza, we stumbled

upon a dead policeman, and, at the next corner, we saw another shed his uniform and run like a deer. After that the streets seemed to be full of naked policemen. Almost instantaneously the city's constabulary got the idea that they were likely to become popular targets, and discarded whatever they thought might make identification easy. A naked policeman is really not a policeman at all, and nudity was only one garment removed from the ordinary citizen of Salvador in 1894.

At that time, very few of our countrymen knew anything about Central America. The Panama Canal had not been built, and there were no luxury cruises from one coast to the other. The best passenger service from San Francisco was that of the Pacific Mail, operating small steamers that loitered in the roads of tiny palm-fringed ports along the western edge of Mexico. My father, Alexander L. Pollock, was a newspaper owner and editor in Salt Lake City when President Cleveland appointed him United States Consul at San Salvador. Telegraphic notification reached our home late in the evening, and until midnight we sat in what now would be called the library, trying to learn something of the land in which my father was to spend the rest of his life. Our search revealed little more than a paragraph or two in an encyclopedia, and we should not have been greatly surprised to find ourselves quartered among savages in jungles.

Salvador *was* primitive, and the revolution in which we were involved seemed to us *opéra bouffe*, with instances and interludes of sheer barbarism. Many of these were mere hearsay, and we took them with the proverbial grain of salt. In the light of what followed in our own world wars, the reported horrors of this conflict seem less singular and more credible. Twenty-three years afterward, at dinner in my home in New York, I related to Oliver Herford, a noted wit of that day, two or three tales of cruelty that had been told us in Salvador. "Sounds like the Germans," Oliver said, and now again these "sound" like the Germans or the Japanese. As a matter of fact the wildest rumors circulated in Salvador in 1894 are tame in comparison with what has been happening in Poland and China. Civilization and passing centuries apply a thin varnish over the animal instincts of much of the so-called human race—a varnish

that disappears in the first flames of hunger, or hatred, or other primeval urges. . . . Which is enough moralizing for now.

The salary of the United States Consul at San Salvador was \$2,000 a year and fees. That seemed a large sum; few of our fellow citizens in Salt Lake, including the most prominent, earned as much, and my father's evening newspaper paid him considerably less. Illness and death in the family had made the going hard, and we were not long deciding to oblige Mr. Cleveland. Father left almost immediately; my mother with her three surviving children—my sister Kate, who was six; my brother John, twelve; and I, the eldest, fourteen—followed a month or two later. Aboard the Pacific Mail Liner *San Blas*, her decks loaded with lumber, we spent more than a fortnight idling along the coast, and finally, at Acajutla, one of the two ports of Salvador, we entered an oversized bird cage and were lowered from the steamer to a lighter beneath. A donkey-engine and another bird cage lifted us from lighter to pier, and restored us to the head of the family.

The capital, which we reached in a primordial railway train, proved to be a checkerboard of whitewashed, one-story adobe houses. As in most tropical places, and particularly those influenced by Spain, there were few windows, and those few mostly iron-barred. Each dwelling had a door from which one crossed a bare room into the patio, or open inner court—usually a garden with palm trees and, in the better houses, a fountain. Every house was a hollow square, every rear room windowless, with a single door opening onto a quadrangular roofed veranda surrounding the patio. Again as in most tropical places, there was little furniture—a table and a chair or two for each chamber, with a four-posted bed, standing in tins of water to discourage scorpions and other undesirable bedfellows. Our only bathroom had a single tap in the wall, and a concave floor with a hole in the center. One used a gourd to pour water over one's body. There was a limited supply of rather porous ice, and dim electric lighting which ceased to function at intervals—as it does to this day in suburban Long Island.

The metropolis boasted only two buildings of more than a single story—the White House, once occupied by the presidents, but then given over to government offices, and the executive mansion,

in which Carlos Ezeta lived across the way from our modest abode. The streets were flanked by narrow sidewalks, paved with cobblestone, and deeply depressed in the center to carry off water from tropical downpours. At each corner was a hinged plank that could be lowered for crossing from one sidewalk to another. There were a few mule-drawn wagons and carriages, but traffic consisted chiefly of little donkeys carrying men or goods, or of pedestrians balancing huge baskets upon their heads. The proletariat was addicted to the one-piece walking-suit aforesaid—a white cotton chemise for women or a pair of cotton trousers for men. To this costume almost every man added a machete. Suspended from the belt for promenade, the machete is a sort of short, straight sword, or cutlass, but in the rural districts it has many shapes, including that of a meat cleaver. Originally intended for cutting sugar cane, I have seen the machete used for everything from shaving to murder.

The foreign colony was small, consisting of thirty or forty of our compatriots and a lesser number of English and Germans. Temporarily, at least, the Kaiser's government was without official representation, but it commanded a greater degree of respect than our own. German warships were frequent visitors, with attendant displays of pomp and military might, and German influence was beginning to prevail in finance and trade. Most of the machetes were "made in Germany." The German salesmen spoke Spanish fluently, and were as well versed in the habits and prejudices of the country. American drummers, on the contrary, rarely knew any language but their own, and were frankly contemptuous of the "natives." My father dealt with this situation in long handwritten reports to our State Department, but I doubt that anyone ever read them. Even then, and especially now, a government that used all the information gathered so ceaselessly and painstakingly would require the storage space of a thousand buildings, and the services of whole armies of clerks. At Singapore, half a century later, an immigration official filled pages with a list of my books, plays and magazine articles. When I left, a week afterward, he began all over again. "You asked those questions last Monday," I protested, "and wrote down my answers."

The official looked at me in bewilderment.

"Yes," he said, "but I haven't the faintest idea where they are now. We don't *keep* these records."

The British Consul at San Salvador dined with us frequently, and, like most of the colony, consumed what seemed to me astonishing quantities of liquor. He had a dachshund whose belly often grounded on a low step in our house, leaving fore and hind legs waving in the breeze; whenever that happened, our friend used to sit staring at the dog with helpless incredulity. Drinking was about the only dependable pastime. My father had never been without his glass of wine with the evening meal. I was ten or twelve years old when I first saw a dinner table without a decanter, and assumed that someone must have forgotten it. However, my father never touched alcohol until the dinner hour, and took very little afterward—an example his children were to follow. He took his consulship seriously, as, indeed, he regarded all work. Given to what now are considered bromidic axioms, which, nevertheless, left lasting impressions with us, he insisted that "nothing else is as important as doing your job." Evenings were a problem. Father pored over the *Red Book*, our government's volume of instruction to its agents, but reading was difficult beneath our feeble electric lights, and I learned cribbage under threat of punishment if I failed to do so. The whole colony spent the early evening in the plaza, listening to a military band and watching the pretty native girls, to whose complexions face powder gave the color of *café au lait*, after which most of us went home to highballs, while father and I droned, "Fifteen two, fifteen four, and eight is twelve."

Our fellow-countrymen were a fantastic lot. The least so, perhaps, was a physician, who had married the daughter of the United States Minister at Guatemala City, and afterward established a sanatorium for tubercular patients at Liberty, N. Y. There was a professional gambler seeking a government concession to conduct a casino, and a soldier of fortune who had fought in every revolution between Mexico and Cape Horn. Eventually the gambler ran out of funds and killed himself. The British Consul, Mr. Campbell, related that this man had said, "I have about one chance in six of getting that concession, and if I don't get it I'm finished." That night he loaded five chambers of his revolver, closed his eyes, spun the cylinder, and, thus giving him-

self one chance in six, pressed the weapon against his temple, pulled the trigger—and lost the game. I don't vouch for the truth of this, or of very much else we heard in San Salvador, but it's a good story.

Another story that awaited us is even less likely to be true, though hardly more incredible than its ending, which was told on better authority during our stay. The government had decided that it needed a navy, and had sent a commission to San Francisco to shop for one. This commission acquired a tugboat, called *Sallie J.*, and the services of her captain. The vessel was to arrive at a certain date, and, word to that effect having been received, a delegation of bands, school children, and prominent citizens went down to meet it. Unfortunately, the commission had failed to report that the *Sallie J.* had been dismantled and shipped aboard a steamer of the Pacific Mail. As the bands began playing the national anthem, and the children singing it, a donkey-engine unloaded the first of a series of crates containing the Salvadorian navy.

Later, the tale ran, the *Sallie J.* was put together again, painted white, christened *Grand Republic of Salvador*, and promptly forgotten. There was a national scandal when it was discovered that her captain had been renting the navy to fishing expeditions at \$10 a day, including bait. The President appointed a Secretary of the Navy, an Admiral, a Rear Admiral, a Commander and a Lieutenant Commander; the crew continued to be the venal but indispensable skipper who had been brought from San Francisco. A heavy gun was imported from Germany. Bands, prominent citizens and white-clad children with nosebags returned to the port, and were lined up on a flag-decked pier to see the gun installed. Another donkey-engine lowered it to the deck, whereupon the navy turned turtle and went to the bottom, leaving bands, children and prominent citizens to go home again with the anthem still unplayed and unsung. A contractor reconditioned the *Grand Republic*, and the army replaced the submerged Krupp gun with a fieldpiece that was taken aboard when the navy was tied to her dock, but wheeled ashore when it had to be fired, or when the vessel put to sea. However, as fuel was expensive, and the tug, all dressed up, had no place to go, she was said never to have left harbor when we arrived in Salvador.

That my father took his post seriously was a credit to his sense of duty rather than his sense of humor. Bureaucrats are funny everywhere, I suppose, but Salvadorian bureaucrats seemed even to my immature mind like overgrown children playing a game. Most of them strutted about in uniform, but did little else. When Congress convened, at noon, everyone out of uniform wore evening dress; Mr. Campbell and my father walked the streets, beneath a broiling sun, in the required tails and silk hats, self-conscious and sweating martyrs to official etiquette. Elections were won by unbelievable majorities—as happens in more “civilized” countries now—and by bullets when ballots failed. Most of the highest authorities were for sale at a fairly moderate price.

Revolution followed a pattern; whoever commanded the army eventually seized the presidency. Carlos Ezeta, chief executive in our time, and his brother Antonio were said to have begun life as bandits. Impressed by their military skill, President Francisco Menendez took them under his wing, sent Carlos to Paris to be educated, and then, foolishly, established him as General-in-Chief at Santa Ana. Still more foolishly, as the tale was told us, he brought Carlos to San Salvador with a large detachment of troops for some kind of celebration. That night he was awakened by gunfire, to find the White House surrounded, and Ezeta, in a doorway, demanding his surrender. Menendez is supposed to have sprung from bed, revolver in hand, and then to have dropped dead in his tracks, the victim of excitement or poison. At any rate, Carlos became president, and sent his brother to Santa Ana as General-in-Chief. Both were still at their posts when we reached Salvador. I went back to Central America a few years ago, to find modern cities and orderly governments, but I retain a hang-over of doubt about compacts with Latin America.

Carlos Ezeta, a tall, heavy, black-bearded man, seems to have been a remarkable combination of savage and Sybarite. He had filled his new palace with paintings and sculpture from Paris, and I remember hearing him discuss the English poets with my father. However, there were persistent rumors of wealthy citizens tortured until they yielded their fortunes, and when, during the revolution we witnessed, an Indian leader suspected of disloyalty emerged from an interview with several bullets in his back, Carlos



was said to have kicked him across the room and to have fired the shots as he fell. Usually a stickler for pomp and ceremony, Ezeta frequently called at the consulate, and made pretty speeches to my mother, who rated them in those days.

We had rented our home furnished from a Spaniard known as Don Manuel Prieto, and for some time life was tranquil and dull. There were eight or ten servants, who received the equivalent of about thirty cents each weekly and were worth it. The boy who blacked our boots couldn't have been persuaded to add anything else to his labors. At first my brother and I studied Spanish with a tutor, but that and all other study were soon given up. We rose very early, for activity during the cooler part of the day; slept through the hot afternoons; dined late, walked in the plaza, as aforesaid, and returned for the inevitable cribbage. Except for visits to and from the British Consul, the doctor and our soldier of fortune, that seems to have been the extent of domestic procedure. Besides writing long reports to Washington, ironing out the difficulties of his compatriots, and earning an occasional fee by presiding over marriages or funerals or signing ship's papers, father began a book, *The Land of Mañana*, that never got beyond its first chapters. He worked in a front room, with a door to the street, above which hung a tin shield bearing a painted American eagle. That particular bird acquired three bullet holes during the revolution, but remained defiant and slightly wall-eyed to the end.

One morning in the early summer of 1894 we were roused by martial music, and, grouped in that front doorway, saw a strange procession. Between ranks of soldiers marched half-naked men, each roped to the man beside or behind him. Don Manuel, who had joined us, said that rebellion had broken out at Santa Ana, Antonio had been driven from the city, and troops were being hurried to his aid. My father asked whether the men tied to one another were convicts, and Don Manuel replied wryly, "Oh, no; they are volunteers."\* We saw many such during the next few weeks. Only the first were fettered, but none wore anything but

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\*From T. R. Ybarra's *Young Man of Caracas*, I learn now that this must have been an old Spanish custom—and joke—throughout Central America. Ybarra reports much the same experience in Venezuela.

his cotton trousers, and few were armed except with their own machetes. Those who had rifles threw them away in battle, we were told, and resorted to the more familiar weapon. We were told also that there was no commissary or medical corps, and no record of "volunteers." Certainly, there were no casualty lists. When the troops returned, we saw women search the procession for brothers or sweethearts, and, failing to find them, run ahead to try again.

"News" came only through the government, and, with paternal assistance, I began to understand the difficulty of separating fact from fiction in the stories we heard, and kept hearing. That is the price of suppressing free speech and a free press. Where little is known much is imagined. Now daily bulletins reported unvarying victory at the front. In consequence, rumor told of unvarying defeat. In this, at least, rumor was right. Except for officials, policemen, foreigners and donkeys, the male animal practically disappeared from San Salvador. The more victories, the more men were rushed to the front. Opportunity knocked at the door of our soldier of fortune, and found him waiting impatiently. The prevailing rate for American adventurers was high, chiefly because they were trustworthy. In the uniform of a major general, our friend made his farewell call, bringing flowers for mother, candy for the children, and a bird to be boarded and lodged during his absence. The uniform, he explained, was his own; he had worn it in a dozen wars, merely changing a detail here or there.

The daily routine went on about as usual. Father doubled the number and length of his reports, and suggested the presence of one of our warships. From force of habit we still walked in the plaza at night, though the military band had been slaughtered in an advance at the head of a regiment. Late in June the United States cruiser *Bennington* anchored at La Libertad, and Captain—afterward Rear Admiral—Thomas brought her chief officers to dine with us on the Fourth of July. Adding his bit to the legend of the Salvadorian navy, Captain Thomas related how, that morning, he had fired the twenty-one-gun salute prescribed for Independence Day. Promptly the *Grand Republic of Salvador* moved her armament ashore, where it could be used without risk to the ship, and fired an answering salute of nine guns. Then her cap-

tain steamed out to the *Bennington* to explain that this had exhausted his ammunition, but that he had sent for more, and the remaining twelve guns would be fired the next day. We children had purchased a little powder for ourselves, and made our own fireworks for the Fourth. I don't know yet what prevented our blowing our heads off.

According to bulletins, federal troops captured Santa Ana almost every afternoon. However, tired and hungry soldiers began straggling into town, and word got around that General Antonio was nearing Santa Tecla, only ten miles from San Salvador, and had advised his brother to put the capital in a state of defense. It was on that night, as related in my first paragraphs, my father and I went to the plaza and saw Carlos "making his getaway." Soon afterward, Antonio reached Santa Tecla, learned that his brother had flown, and was said to have looted the local bank, loaded the silver on donkeys, and to be fighting his way to La Libertad. Antonio had retreated from Santa Ana with an army that deserted in regiments, and left Santa Tecla with about four hundred men. These were picked off by snipers on the road to the port, which proved to be in rebel hands. Our soldier of fortune, who was second in command, made a stand at the customs house, and Captain Thomas landed marines to protect American property. Ezeta was taken aboard the *Bennington*, and, that settled, our soldier of fortune promptly made a bargain with the revolutionists and became their chief officer. When last heard of, he was enjoying the fruits of honest labor in a luxurious apartment in New York.

The rebels had captured the navy, and leaving its cannon ashore, dispatched it to prevent Ezeta's being transferred to the Pacific Mail Liner *City of Panama*, which was in the harbor. Alarmed, the *Panama's* captain fired rockets, and the *Bennington* responded with searchlights. The *Grand Republic's* improvised crew, armed with rifles, had never seen a searchlight before. Taking these to be a sign from heaven, they fell upon their knees in prayer, the *Grand Republic* drifted into the breakers, and most of the eighty or ninety men aboard her were drowned. One of the Ezetas, I believe, was killed subsequently in San Francisco; what happened to the other apparently "nobody knew and nobody cared."

Within a few days, the new government had restored order in San Salvador, but yellow fever invaded the city and panic ensued. The mosquito was still unsuspected, and we attributed the sudden appearance of the disease to water contaminated by unburied bodies, which the revolution had left in the fields. Father's newspaper, the *Salt Lake Times*, was in financial difficulties, and he had obtained leave of absence and purchased steamship tickets with which to take the family home for a few weeks. Now, however, there were difficulties in the consulate, too. Washington had withheld recognition of the new government at San Salvador, and our countrymen became exceedingly unpopular in consequence. There were unpleasant incidents and discriminations; tempests in a teapot, but to my father a tempest was a tempest, whatever its location, and always called for his presence on the bridge. "I'll stay here," he said. "You and the children had better go home."

Mother refused.

Nevertheless, it became obvious that we could not remain in San Salvador. Several of the colony had died and, as there was no Protestant clergyman, my father had conducted the funeral services. He was overworking in terrific heat, and was worried about the family, which worried equally about him. "I've rented a place in the hills," he announced, "and all of you are to move there tomorrow."

"Not without you," mother said.

"I tell you I *can't* go."

"With that unhealed wound in your groin, the doctor says that if you caught the fever you'd die within a few hours."

"I've got to take the chance."

"Have you no fear?" mother asked, and of course I have never forgotten my father's reply. "No fear," he said, "as great as the fear of not doing my duty." It sounds melodramatic here, but there was no melodrama in father's utterance—a simple statement of his only creed. "I'll come to you every Saturday," father promised, and that was that.

The place in the hills was a coffee plantation, or *finca*, eight miles past Santa Tecla, whither we went by train. The second stage of the journey was made over a shockingly bad road. Our caravan consisted of the family and an American woman we had met in Sal-

vador, Bella Dunkinson. The servants we found at the *finca* were headed by an aged major-domo known to us only as Sylvester. The house was rude but comfortable—high in the hills and surrounded by taller mountains, one of which we used to climb in the evening for the view of an active volcano that made a magnificent spectacle. Father spent several week ends with us, always in excellent spirits, real or assumed. The fever was abating, he said, and he had reserved accommodations aboard the steamer *Colima*, sailing in a little more than a month.

Only a few days after that a government messenger brought word of father's illness. Within half an hour mother was on her way to San Salvador. Bella Dunkinson carried on, but next morning we woke to find ourselves forsaken by all the servants but Sylvester. The cookhouse was a separate building, and they had taken with them everything edible. Sylvester thought they had joined a band of deserters from the army that was looting the countryside between us and Santa Tecla. It would be very dangerous, he said, to leave the plantation, and he was probably right.

Without supplies of our own, however, rations were low. There was plenty of fruit and coffee, and three times a day we ate beans and the native cakes of hand-ground corn called *tortillas*. When two brothers named Mitchell, who had just heard of us, rode over from their plantation for luncheon, Bella gave our table a festal appearance by placing in its center a plate bearing a silver-paper-wrapped cake of a soap popular then, called Sapolio. The Mitchells were undeceived, and soon returned with saddlebags bulging with tinned food. A week passed without news of my father, and, in defiance of Bella I decided to go to San Salvador. Sylvester saddled a donkey and I started at dawn, reaching Santa Tecla safely before the heat of the day, but only to find that the marauders had torn up part of the railway and there were no trains.

A very tired lad, on a very tired burro, I reached San Salvador late in the afternoon. Panic had increased, rather than diminished, and the city seemed to be almost uninhabited. I passed vacant residences, from which the dwellers had fled so precipitately that, in two cases, doors and windows were still open and belongings exposed to anyone who dared risk taking them. From the sidewalks to a height of two or three feet the walls of many houses had been

painted black, in token of mourning. The consulate was closed, with a soldier on guard. As he barred my way, I threw a stone at the door, and my mother appeared, plainly distressed at seeing me. "You can't come in," she said. "Your father has yellow fever. Spend the night at the Hotel Nueva Mundo, and then go back to the plantation where you'll be safe. I'll send word there."

I had no money. The proprietor of the hotel would have sent my bill to the consulate, but I was fourteen, and frightened, and that didn't occur to me. Instead, I fed my donkey from a bag Sylvester had tied to the pommel, watered him at the river, and without food or water for myself, started back to the *finca*. Fool's luck presided over us; we plunged along through the darkness, and encountered no one. About the time that I tumbled from the saddle into Bella's arms, my father died.

The news was several days reaching us. With it came word that my mother had been stricken, too, and that, whatever happened, we were to remain in the hills. We did, during a period that seemed interminable. The Mitchells had brought additional supplies during my absence, but then were seen no more. A week passed, and most of another week. Finally an oxcart arrived, with four soldiers, to take us and our belongings to Santa Tecla. A letter from our doctor friend said mother had recovered and was recuperating in a hospital there.

My sister and brother and our trunks were loaded into the oxcart, and set off. Bella and I were to follow on donkeys. Two or three miles along, we came to a sign with a crudely painted hand pointing to the Mitchell plantation. Bella thought we should ride over to say good-by. "It won't take long," she insisted, "and we can soon catch up with the cart." However, when we arrived the Mitchell house seemed more completely deserted than our own. I dismounted and hammered at the door. Unlatched, it swung open, and I walked through the front room into the patio.

The elder of the two Mitchells was standing alone at the head of an open grave, reading the burial service over his brother. "Go away," he called to me, as my mother had done. "Go away, and if possible send a doctor from Santa Tecla. My brother died last night; I took care of everything, and I'm afraid I've got the fever, too, so send a doctor if you can." He resumed reading, "I am the

resurrection and the life, saith the Lord,' " and Bella and I rode back to the highway.

We never saw or heard more of the Mitchells. The native physician we dispatched from Santa Tecla promised to send a message to the consulate, but we never saw that again, either. We joined my mother, who still looked very ill, and a few days later sailed for home in the rooms father had reserved for himself and us in the *Colima*. My mother was put to bed, and a very solemn youngster, who was myself, and who must have read of the proceeding somewhere, stood at the ship's after-rail and gravely wiped from his boots the dust of Salvador.

Five years ago I went back to Central America. A quarter of a century before that, what was believed to be my father's body, in a tightly sealed metal casket, had been brought home to the family plot in Salt Lake. His successor reported, "The vault appears to answer the description given. Diligent search was made for the silver plate bearing the name and the dates of birth and death, but no such plate could be found." The great probability is that this casket *was* my father's; there must always be some doubt in the matter but my mother was satisfied, and that was the main consideration.

Returning from the Orient in 1937, my wife and daughter and I sailed from San Francisco to New York by way of the Panama Canal. Aboard the vessel we learned that Grace Liners landed passengers at Salvador only on the west-bound trip. We spent a day at Guatemala City, and at four the next morning our ship anchored in the roads at La Libertad. I rose and went on deck. Everything I saw had dwindled amazingly—the town; the dock, which I had recalled as being a hundred feet high; even the lighters that came out to us. Nevertheless, being a sentimentalist, I clung to the rail long after we had weighed anchor, peering past La Libertad into my boyhood, with its dreams of a career for myself that has dwindled almost as much as the port from which, forty-three years before, I had sailed into the future.

## LIFE WITH FATHER

I WAS nearly thirty years old before I discovered that my father was a Jew. He had been dead sixteen years then, and as I was walking down Broadway, New York, with his brother, I repeated a feeble joke on the race that I had intended for my next play. Uncle Fred was silent a moment, and then he said, "I don't think a Jew should feed the growing prejudice against Jews."

"Are we Jews?" I asked—not greatly surprised, because of late I had been putting together a dozen indicative recollections.

"Of course," Fred answered. "Didn't you know that?"

"I had thought of it as possible, but it never seemed of any particular importance."

"It has always been important in the past," my uncle remarked, "and it will be in the future. We have been lucky enough to live during the only few years that, in one country at least, it didn't matter."

That, I realized, was the explanation of my ignorance. Except a few months following my birth, March 4, 1880, in Washington, D. C., and three years spent abroad, the days of my early youth were divided between Omaha and Salt Lake City. At ten, in the former place, I recall having been addicted to a little girl named Auerbach, and I assume she was a Jewess. The familiars at our home in Salt Lake were Governor West, chief executive of the Territory of Utah; Judge Goodwin, editor of the *Tribune*, and a dozen others among whom, I know now, were two or three Jews. I didn't know then that they had Jewish blood, and I'm sure none of our associates knew that we had. Nobody cared. In Salt Lake a "gentile" was anyone outside the Mormon Church; for purely



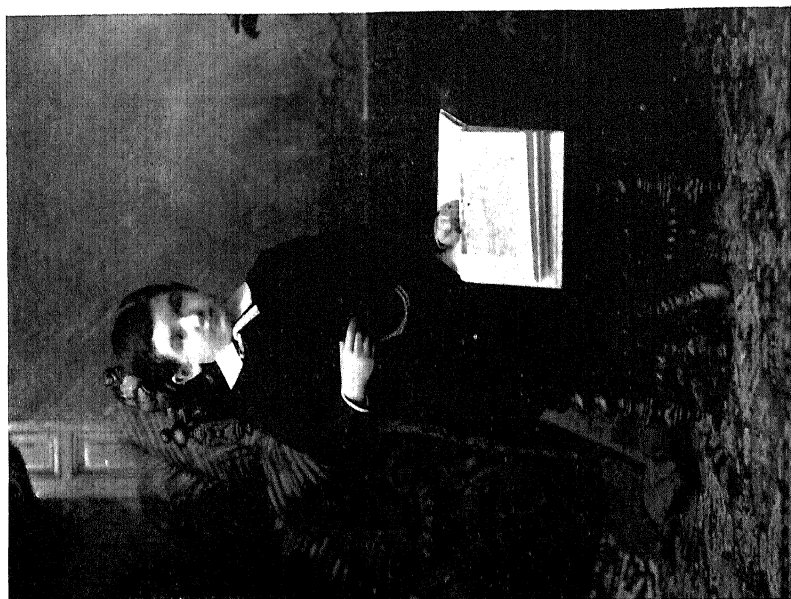
political reasons, we took cognizance of Mormons, though with the greatest respect for them. Otherwise, we had no interest in another man's race, and very little in his faith, his fortune, or his forebears. We were concerned with a man's personal attractiveness, his intelligence and integrity, but, in the western states, at any rate, prejudice on account of blood or creed awaited the coming of a higher civilization.

My father, Alexander L. Pollock, was born in a village about forty miles from Prague, capital of ancient Bohemia, which was then part of Austria-Hungary. His father was a farmer, kept the country store, and had been burgomaster. When I saw him, in 1887, he was a tall, broad-shouldered old man, still vigorous and erect, and with an aggressive independence inherited by his twelve or thirteen children. The village knew and laughed at the story of how my grandfather refused to fly a flag on the birthday of the Emperor Franz Josef, because, he said, "The Emperor didn't fly a flag on my birthday." My grandfather laughed, too, but there had been more than jest in his defiance of authority. Something of the sort explained my father's flight to America in the seventies to escape military service in his own country, and then his prompt enlistment in the United States Army. The latter service was voluntary; the former would not have been.

In Bohemia, all my grandfather's twelve or thirteen children walked five miles, winter and summer, to the nearest school, and five miles back to their home. To do this, they rose at four in the morning, and throughout the winter both journeys were made in darkness. All of them graduated from the university at Prague with the thorough educations that were characteristically German. Fred was one of the most learned men I ever met, and he insisted that my father was even more erudite. As to that, I must take Fred's word. I never really knew my father, though I lived under his roof fourteen years. None of us knew him—my mother least of all—and certainly he did not know himself. He was a man of passionate faiths, violent tempers and vast impatience; a perpetual internecine revolution. There is little doubt that he loved us, and less doubt that we bored him to tears. When first he took us abroad "to see and be seen by my family," and then left us there, that explanation



MY FATHER AND MOTHER  
Shortly after their marriage in 1879.



THE AUTHOR  
in two stages of his development.

was probably the truth if not the whole truth. Our second banishment, which occurred two years later and lasted a year, was rather frankly the result of his desire to be rid of us.

Why he married, and especially why he married my mother, remains an unsolved mystery. Perhaps for the not-uncommon reason that she must have been very pretty then. Her name was Verona Larkin, and she was of an English Christian family that moved to Virginia in the seventeenth century. They were a soft, kindly, likable and generally unambitious tribe. Many of them still live on the land they settled, and never seem to have done much about it. With few exceptions even the talented members of the family and the brilliantly educated have remained placid and undistinguished. They produced two physicians of standing, but most of the "git up and git" seems to have been in the blood of my maternal grandmother, whose brother, General Berdan, invented the Berdan rifle and commanded Berdan's Sharpshooters throughout the Civil War. Mother was born in the homestead at Manassas; "the only child," she insisted, "scared into the world by the first battle of Bull Run." She had kin on both sides of that engagement, and always attributed her survival to the appearance, at a critical moment, of troops headed by General Berdan.

My father was a short, slim, rather swarthy man, with the blackest and kinkiest hair I ever saw on a Caucasian. When the pair met, my male parent was serving in the weather bureau at Washington under that General Adolphus Washington Greely who was said to have eaten one of the men who went with him to find the North Pole. Greely had done nothing of the sort, but the story was current, and then, as now, many people were eager to believe the worst. A year or two after their marriage, while I was still an infant, my father was transferred to Omaha, which he described as "a mudhole." It probably was. The population hardly exceeded 30,000 souls—allowing a soul to every body, which never seemed to me dependable figuring. There certainly were no paved streets, and few impressive buildings. I remember the cries of a woman who was murdered in front of our house one night—but that appears now to be no indication of a backward community. The weather bureau was on top of the post office, and in that office one day my father fell from a chair on which he was standing,

and a pointed part of its frame pierced his groin, inflicting a wound from which he suffered the rest of his life and which contributed to his death.

This suffering probably accounted for some of his moodiness and dudgeon. Most of it, I think, was an inheritance accentuated by his impatience with stupidity, and with finding himself a square peg in a series of round holes. Moodiness and dudgeon were relieved by frequent flashes of sardonic humor, and by intervening periods of great kindness and generosity. Two of the few scraps of his writing I possess are notes scrawled in Central America. The first was addressed to our medical friend, Dr. J. E. Stubbert, whose servant had been running to and from the consulate all day with letters as to how his mistress and my mother were to dress for an official function. "Dear Stubbert," it begins. "I shall wear my pink underclothing tonight, tastefully blended with green silk socks. I hope your costume will not clash, so kindly keep me informed. . . . P. S. Shall you use a gold or an ivory shirt-button?" The second note, sent to me during a conference with President Gutierrez, asks for certain papers, and ends with, "When you have done this, you boys may go swimming." The swimming was in a river only two or three feet deep, but it was characteristic of one side of my father that he should have thought of this while transacting important and rather painful government business.

On the other side were dark broodings and sudden eruptions. When he edited an evening newspaper father usually dined with us, and left the table to sit for hours alone with a basket of apples and a book. It was not considered wise to interrupt the consumption of either. He hated dishonesty, injustice, ignorance and pretence, and that hatred could be explosive. My soft little mother wasn't given to reading, but, like so many other people who lack that interest, *was* given to comment on what she hadn't read. My father could be very cruel at these times. After domestic disturbances, during my early boyhood, he locked himself in his room, remaining there for days, and was nourished only from a tray that Cecil, our Swedish maid of all work, left outside his door.

Cecil was a product of that era. As was common then we regarded her as one of the family. As was common, also, she cooked, baked, washed, ironed and kept the house and the children in re-

turn for a weekly wage of three dollars. I don't think anyone ever felt sorry for Cecil, and she certainly never felt sorry for herself. Three dollars bought a good deal in those days, and Cecil had few wants that were not lovingly supplied. No one could keep her from overworking; I remember hearing her in the kitchen at midnight, and at five in the morning, and when, after nine years, Cecil left us for matrimony, she wept, and we wept, and none of us could be comforted.

It is a mistake to consider income without relation to prices and requirements. Recently, painters and paperhangers in Brooklyn struck to maintain their wage scale of \$10.50 for a seven-hour day. Except for one brief interlude that is nearly double the largest sum my father ever earned, but we lived well and saved money. Our home in Omaha was a neat frame house in Spruce Street, which was some distance out of town. My brother and I shared a room overlooking the one-story kitchen, and I recall waking the morning of the big blizzard of 1888 to find that one story buried in snow, and our window only two or three feet above what appeared to be terra firma. We had a garden, an orchard, and a stable that sheltered horses, carriages and a sleigh. As I have said, well-paid servants received three dollars a week. A dozen eggs sold for twelve cents, and a pound of sirloin steak at about the same figure. There was no "high cost of living," and, what is more to the point, no cost of high living. When my mother—or anyone's mother—required eggs or beefsteak, she went to a grocer or butcher who paid the smallest possible rent for a little shop in a side street. There were no telephones, no ornate delivery cars, and no expensive packaging; what mother purchased was weighed before her eyes, wrapped in cheap brown paper, and carried home in a basket. All these savings, of course, were passed on to the consumer.

Life was simple in the eighties, and perhaps that enchantment which distance lends to the view explains my conviction that it was no less pleasant or comfortable. None of the money-eating gadgets that have become necessities in our day was known or desired. We did very well without telephones, movies, radios, motor cars and electric refrigeration. We did without a great many things that existed but seemed unessential. Our whole habit of thought was

different; we paused before squandering a nickel, and conferred as to spending a dollar. My brother and I each had a personal allowance of twenty-five cents a month. Unless my mother drove him to or from his office, my father walked to save carfare, and it seemed to do him no harm. Almost everyone in my father's position now pays twenty bills a month that he would have thought ridiculous—to florists, restaurants and the like. At the depth of our recent depression a clerk in a gadget shop told me that, within a few weeks, they had sold, at a dollar each, several gross of tiny glass spears, of elaborate design, for lifting cherries from cocktails. The richest man of our acquaintance would have considered such a purchase not only wasteful but childish.

I suppose we knew several rich men, but, as stated, in that day and part of the world we were not much more conscious of wealth or class than of race or creed. The president of our biggest bank lived across the street from us. Every spring he painted his own house. His wife did her own housework. Cecil was one of three "hired girls" in our neighborhood. The wives of our friends hadn't leisure for bridge or the movies, even if either had been invented, but when they spent an evening with us, I seem to remember rather better informed conversation than one hears at modern dinner parties. Cultural nourishment we found chiefly in our own homes; there were very few clubs, concerts or lectures. We agreed with that wit who described the new Norwegian dramatist as "Ibscene," and newspaper cartoons showed Wagner beating a tin pan. It is possible, of course, that the judgments of this age may seem equally quaint after another fifty years. Our theater, at least, was far from contemptible. Boyd's Opera House brought us Salvini, Modjeska and Clara Morris; my brother and I missed our only chance of seeing Booth and Barrett in *Othello* when we traded our matinee tickets for seats at a melodrama called *The Stowaway*. For weeks we had gaped at lithographic representations of masked men cracking a safe, and boys would be boys even in the eighties.

Eventually there were five of us children, two girls and three boys, but only the latter had been born at this time, and a brother and sister died later. John and I attended the public schools, where neither of us learned much. Then, as now, few of our teachers had any real talent for imparting knowledge; we were

so many little automobiles on an assembly line, to each of which was added a mental nut or bolt as it passed. If the nut didn't fit, or a human car slipped by without receiving its bolt, that was just too bad. My class had not yet been initiated in the mysteries of multiplication when a short illness removed me from the assembly line. It had reached division when I returned, and, as my absence was only a notation on a card, and no one thought to give me the instruction I had missed, for months I struggled to divide sums without even suspecting that preliminary step in the process. Then, as now, precious time was wasted in pleasant supererogations. In common with the other children, Friday afternoons I recited "Marco Bozzaris" and "Horatius at the Bridge," without, I'm afraid, much effect on our afterlives. None of us was told for what altars and fires Marco urged striking, or details of the emergency that produced Horatius. From beginning to end mine was a catch-as-catch-can education—but isn't nearly everyone's? Mostly we get what we dig up for ourselves, and digging begins after schooling ends. I was an indifferent student at best, and a teacher's report unearthed recently indicates that my deportment left much to be desired.

I don't know why or how my father abandoned the weather for journalism, but very shortly he became an editor of the *Omaha Herald*. At last he had found work for which he had special fitness, if not actual genius. He wrote clearly, pungently, and with great force and individuality. Moreover, he always wrote exactly what he believed. "I can understand stealing money," he said once, "but I can't understand literary dishonesty." Before long, the paternal editorials were being widely quoted; he was contributing pretty good verse to numerous periodicals, and regularly a column of humorous prose to the *New York Sun*. One evening he announced that he had borrowed \$2,000, and with another five hundred could buy a decrepit weekly known as *The Watchman*. Family banks were rifled, family friends besought, and within a few days my father had become a publisher. His industry was prodigious. He cleaned the press and the type with his own hands; spent his nights at the *Herald* and his days at *The Watchman*. Though we hadn't heard the story then, John and I could have understood



that child of another editor who asked his mother, "Who's the strange man who comes here Sundays and whips us?"

But *The Watchman* prospered. At that time, Brann's *Iconoclast* was winning national reputation for vigor and fearlessness; within a more limited area my father's weekly newspaper commanded equal attention. He was offered, and refused, bribes, favors and political preferment. Most of what the paper earned paid debts and went into new presses and type, but for a while we regarded ourselves as rich people. Thereupon, my strange sire, who had not communicated with his family in Europe since leaving home more than a decade before, decided that they must see what he had produced in America. With the three children and a fourth that was to arrive presently, he and my mother boarded the Cannon Ball Express—nineteen hours from Omaha to Chicago—and went on to New York and Hoboken, where we took second-class passage to Bremen on the North German Lloyd steamer, *Fulda*.

She was regarded as a large and luxurious vessel—five hundred feet over all, eight thousand tons burden, two smokestacks and four masts that carried sail when the wind was favorable. There was plenty of wind. My father, agonizingly seasick and in danger of opening his always troublesome wound, swore that he wouldn't return until there was a tunnel under the Atlantic. The voyage lasted eleven days. All five of us were housed in a single cabin with not more than three feet of space between the bunks—uppers and lowers. We ate, when we ate, which was not frequently, perched on revolving stools at a long table. On deck in the morning and in the saloon at dinner, a brass band played. It was composed of the stewards—and they were good stewards. We spent a day in Bremen, three days in Berlin, and two hours after our arrival in Prague my father was arrested for having evaded service in the Austrian army.

He had been a citizen of the United States nearly ten years then, and in those days the ill-treatment of an American citizen by a foreign government brought action from Washington. Released promptly, my father as promptly locked himself up again, in his bedroom, and remained there a week, at the end of which he returned to Omaha. Though all of us had mastered German when we came home, eleven months later, we were never permitted

## SALT LAKE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

1892-1893.

SECOND HALF YEAR.

Name *Channing Volleb*Grade *7* Class *11*

BRANCHES	FIRST MONTH	SECOND MONTH	THIRD MONTH	FOURTH MONTH	FIFTH MONTH	AVERAGE OF MONTHS	FIRST TERM REVIEWS	SECOND TERM REVIEWS	AVERAGE OF REVIEWS	FINAL AVERAGE
Reading	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>					
Writing	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>					
Spelling	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>					
Language	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>					

Average for m'th	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>
Deportment	<i>E</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	
Days attendance	<i>1920</i>					
Days absence						
Days belonging	<i>1920</i>					
Times tardy						

E—Excellent (80 or above). G—Good (70 to 79). F—Fair (60 to 69). P—Poor (50 to 49).  
 VP—Very Poor (below 49).

## PARENT'S SIGNATURE.

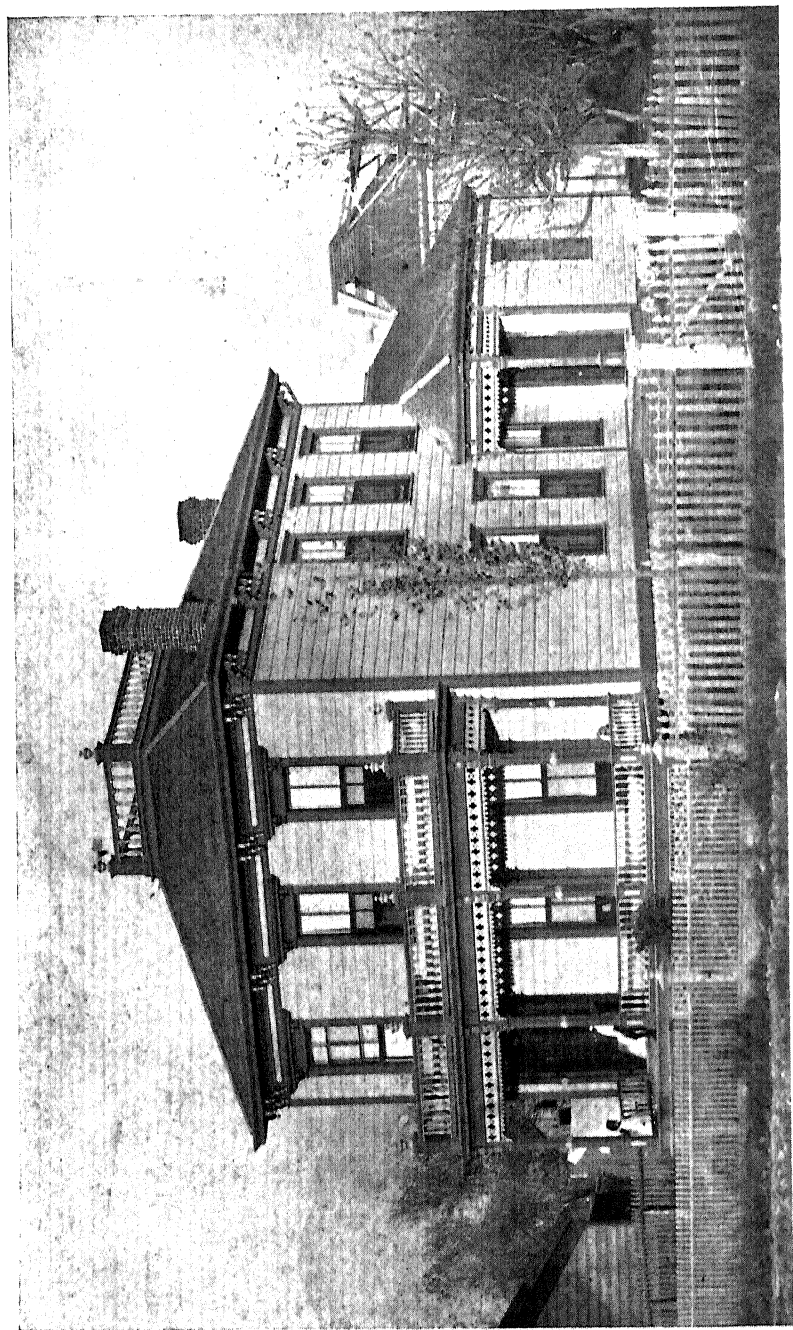
First Month *A. L. Folsch*  
 Second Month *Sorry to learn C. deportment is poor & ASP*  
 Third Month  
 Fourth Month  
 Fifth Month

Parents will please carefully examine the above report, sign in proper space and return to-morrow to

*J. H. Newburn* Teacher.

## A TEACHER'S REPORT

unearthed recently indicates that my deportment left much to be desired.  
 Note that my father was "sorry."



OUR HOME IN SALT LAKE CITY

It was at 517 South Main Street, and represented luxury in the west of the early '90's.

to speak it in my father's hearing. He was through with everything Teutonic—Bavarian, Prussian, Austrian, or whatnot. His rage had produced one tangible result—my sister Kate, who was born prematurely a few hours after his stormy departure from his brother's flat in the Weinberge.

Prague was then, as it still must be, a beautiful old city. The Weinberge, on a hill, back of the Bohemian Museum, was one of the modern districts, with the first apartment houses I had ever seen, but the original town around the chief thoroughfare, called the Grabend, had few buildings that had not stood there hundreds of years. Adjacent streets were narrow and tortuous. The Ghetto was still in existence, though Jews were under no compulsion to live in it. The Czechs, who composed five-sixths of the population of 400,000, dreamed of that liberty which they were so soon to win and so soon to lose. Antagonism between them and the Germans was latent but strong; signs on most shops were lettered in both languages. There was a German Museum and a Czechish Museum, a German opera house and a Czechish. With my Uncle Solon and his family, we went frequently to the German opera, and between the acts drank beer under the trees in the garden. Everyone drank beer; my newly arrived sister had it in her nursing bottle.

The Germans I met then, and afterward, were a gentle, kindly, studious people; their subsequent behavior requires psychological understanding beyond my powers. Both of the cousins with whom we lived fought in the First World War; when I knew them, the one who was to be killed in France was a dreamy lad chiefly interested in Goethe, and the other, who went mad in a prison camp in Russia, would have stepped aside to avoid crushing a beetle. On my return to Prague in 1890 they and my brother and I attended an *untergymnasium*, or grade school, together. On Sundays, both families crossed the quaint Karlsbrücke to wander and picnic in the woods, while Oscar read or recited from *Faust*. Afterward, and enviously, I watched my cousins swim in the River Moldau, from one of the innumerable quadrangular bathhouses. My youngest and gayest uncle was a famous swimmer; he had won several medals, and was puzzled that this training was not compulsory in

America. "It seems to me," he said, "that your country lacks discipline. People should be free in everything but what makes for their own safety and development. Otherwise, liberty may destroy itself. The balance is delicate, and few, if any, peoples have ever maintained it." Later, he scrawled this wisdom in his copy of *Faust* and gave it to me.

It was in Prague, at the age of eight, that I wrote my first play. It was a tragedy in blank verse—very blank, I'm afraid—and rather ambiguously headed, "How to Win a Girl—in four acts." Before a line of it had been set down, that play very nearly produced a riot. The Czechish stationer to whom I went for writing materials violently resented my asking for them in German, and when his imprecations had drawn a crowd of both races and battle seemed imminent, I escaped, not with the pad I required but with a sheet of drawing paper six feet square. Spreading this upon the bare hardwood floor of my room, I crawled over it, leaving a wake of what I felt sure to be immortal words. Quaintly, my uncle took the effort quite seriously, and carried it to a celebrated Czechish poet and critic who, as seriously, gave the opinion that it indicated no literary talent whatever. Still more quaintly, in the period of hardship following the first World War, this old scholar owed a certain amount of comfort to the return from his translation of my later play, *Such a Little Queen*. It was my misfortune, at that time, to be taken seriously by a number of relatives. Still in Prague, and still aged eight, I composed a quatrain:

"There has never shone a sunny sky without some  
fleecy speck,  
There has never roared an ocean storm without some  
fearful wreck,  
There has never been a heaven blue without some  
little cloud,  
And never yet a human heart that has not cried  
aloud."

The lines were sufficiently commonplace, goodness knows, but the family stubbornly refused to believe I could have originated such beauty, and spent weeks looking through volumes of verse for the source. This was my earliest experience with the charge of

plagiarism that has become part of almost every profitable literary career.

We returned to Omaha in 1888 to learn that my father had sold *The Watchman* and invested the entire proceeds in an institution called the Post Office Drug Store. Except for their effect, he wouldn't have known a Seidlitz powder from cyanide of potassium, but someone had told him that ice-cream soda, which retailed then at five cents a glass, cost less than two cents, so father became a pharmacist, worked at it sixteen hours a day, and went into debt for the most ornate soda fountain west of Chicago. When mother remonstrated—less, I suspect, on economic than on social grounds—father sent us back to Austria. While we were away, he wrote us that he was flat broke, and leaving for Salt Lake City to go into the real-estate business—of which he knew almost as much as he knew about drugs. We remained in Prague for the adequate reason that there was no money to get us home. When we did return, over a year later, it wasn't real estate that brought us. Father had become editor of the Salt Lake *Herald*.

Salt Lake was another "mudhole," but a more attractive one. The little, rambling, unpaved city nestled among snow-covered mountains whose crystal water ran at both sides of its tree-lined streets. The vast, egg-shaped and unsupported roof of the Mormon Tabernacle and the graceful granite of the Mormon Temple were more impressive than now, when they are encircled by taller buildings. Next in importance were the three structures that until recently had housed Brigham Young and his numerous wives—the Bee Hive, the Lion House, and the Amelia Palace, built for the favorite, which she shared with none of the others. Humbler polygamists erected two-story dwellings—oblongs set on end—for themselves and their first wives, and added a square, with a window and door, for each subsequent helpmate. One could guess the number of wives by the number of windows and doors. Polygamy continued to be an essential tenet of the Church of Latter Day Saints—really essential, since there were still a great many more women than men, and increased population was necessary to survival.

Strangely, it was the women rather than the men who clung

more tenaciously to this system. When the Federal Government outlawed polygamy in Utah, and, shortly after our arrival, built a handsome home in which plural wives were invited to live as its guests, so few took advantage of the offer that the place was soon closed. We employed a cook who proved to have been the fourth wife of a prosperous merchant. When their marriage was dissolved she proudly declined his financial assistance and that of the government, preferring menial labor—an example that was followed by hundreds of others. The Mormons were—and still are—a simple, self-reliant and scrupulously honest people. Before “the gentiles” came, it was said that one could leave his watch on the doorstep with every prospect of finding it there next morning. Brigham Young’s disciples drank no tea, coffee or alcohol. They contributed one-tenth of their earnings to the church, worked hard, minded their own business and seemed to me then and now as desirable citizens as any who live in our commonwealth.

Most of the “gentiles” who flocked to the territory in the early nineties were persuaded that Mormons were strange and evil creatures. Some of the more ignorant newcomers were disappointed at finding the original population without horns and tails. Many others maintained an attitude of active resentment. There was no justification for this. The Mormons had settled the country and made it habitable; rightly, it belonged to them. All they asked was to be let alone—but no other wish, perhaps, is as difficult of fulfillment. From a wider view, of course, it was impossible that Utah should remain an independent 85,000 square miles surrounded by the United States. As immigration increased, the struggle for political control became bitter. Before an election, “gentile” paraders marched through the streets to the rhythmic chant of “Mud! Mud! Mor-mon mud!” On these occasions, the houses of their adherents were brightly illuminated, while the Latter Day Saints went in for what is now called a blackout.

My father couldn’t have remained neutral at a battle between two ants. He was either fervently in favor of a thing or as fervently opposed to it. The role of partisan but passive bystander, to which our nation has been addicted so often and so damagingly, would have been beyond his understanding. We respected the Mormons, and had many friends among them, but my father wanted Utah

to become a state, and believed this was impossible while it was ruled by the Church. The *Herald* persisted in a middle-of-the-road policy. The *Deseret Evening News* was Church-controlled, while Judge Goodwin thundered in the *Tribune* against faith and works alike. Therefore, our family crusader determined to found a newspaper of his own. We had no money, but that was never an obstacle to my father. In fact, my father never met an obstacle; he didn't ignore difficulties, he simply was unaware of them. A Jew, as I have said, by race but not by creed, he had started the first Unitarian Church in the West. So far as he was able to discover, there were no other Unitarians in Salt Lake—and I doubt that my father was any more a Unitarian than he was a Baptist or a Catholic. He greatly admired William Ellery Channing, however—which accounts for my Christian name—and Channing was a Unitarian. We imported a clergyman of that persuasion, and for weeks his wife and my father and mother and their children were the entire congregation. My mother belonged to the Episcopal Church—but what matter? The first meetings were held in our home. Later, father found or converted enough Unitarians to hire the Salt Lake Theater—by which time he had tired of the whole enterprise and forgot it.

I never knew how Alexander L. Pollock became owner, publisher, and, of course, editor of the *Evening Times*, but \$17 I had saved to buy a bicycle went into it. There were silent—very silent—partners, and I suspect that, because of carelessly made contracts, they got most of the money the paper earned. Temporarily, that was considerable. Whatever his other capacities or incapacities, my father could write, and in a fashion that created eager readers—simply, entertainingly, but with passionate conviction. And how he worked—always! For a time, I don't think we saw our male parent twice a week, and mother was gay, and gentle and quite helpless. Once more I found myself in the public schools and, by some miracle, in the eighth grade. Nothing in particular had led up to that. The fifth had been my top-reach in Omaha; I had left to be taught in a language I didn't understand in Austria, and, as soon as I did understand, we left Austria. Two of my new schoolmates were little girls who afterward married



friends of mine in New York—the actor, William B. Mack, and the dramatist, Owen Davis. When I laughed while studying a geography that proved to be only a cloak for *Sparks from Bill Nye's Pen*, I was punished by being compelled to sit a whole morning with the present Mrs. Davis—which I recall as having been no punishment at all.

I must have been a maddening youngster. For no reason I can perceive now I began to be sure I was a genius, and did my best to live up to the part. On my shelves today stands a battered volume of Byron in which, with the date 1889—when I was nine years old—I wrote:

“Poet beyond where men may rise,  
And they who misunderstanding, soon despise;  
Your grandeur may requite each painful breath—  
Poet in life and hero unto death.”

And I signed it Channing L. L. Pollock. I had given myself two middle names—those of my father's and mother's families. At ten I was well acquainted with Thackeray, Scott and especially Dickens. I used to read until very late at night; when my mother discovered the fact and threatened, I covered my transom so that the light could not be seen from outside. Also I wet towels in cold water and tied them around my head. Somewhere I had heard of another genius who did that, and the idea appealed to me. Uncle Fred, who lived with us, made fun of me once, and so I announced my intention of killing myself. I prepared a creditable noose, swung it over a rafter in the attic, placed it about my neck, and stood on a packing box. I must have been there a quarter of an hour before, to my intense relief, the family found me. I doubt that their failure to do so would have resulted fatally, but mother became hysterical, and Fred very properly turned me over his knee.

It followed “as the night the day” that I should organize a company of actors. A dozen of us children had bungled through plays of my composition on an improvised stage in the garden of the hotel that first sheltered us in Salt Lake. Now, however, heaven revealed itself. The family of Elbert Thomas, currently United States Senator from Utah, were well-to-do, and they turned their unused stable into a really charming tiny theater which we called

To some or other at  
least

Annora Wells - pretty daughter of a lawyer

Mr. Wells - a Philadelphia lawyer

Mr. Thompson - a poorlover

Mr. Lopus - a villain and rival lover of Thompson  
the devil

John - servants to the lawyer

Jack - ~~best~~ keeper in the asylum

Mr. Downs - seconds  
Mr. Dalpus

crowd bridesmaids priest doctor etc.

act 1 a beautiful room in the lawyer's house.

#### MY FIRST PLAY

Part of the first page of the original manuscript completed at the age of 8. "My spelling still gives editors occasional shocks."



THE CAST OF "THE NOBLE OUTCAST"

My brother John was the Outcast—second from right—and I the black-mustached and silk-hatted villain second from left.

the Barnacle. There we youngsters presented several melodramas under my direction, and so badly that after witnessing one performance my father made us refund the admission fee, which was ten cents—my first clash with dramatic criticism! However, we progressed, and in time did *The Noble Outcast*, with the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, in the Salt Lake Theater for the benefit of the Unitarian Church. My brother John was the Outcast, and I the black-mustached and silk-hatted villain, James Blackburn. Also, I played Romeo—feeling very immodest in my lavender silk tights.

Neither my Shakespeare nor my scholarship seems to have won much acclaim, but I was not without ambition, industry and self-reliance. I enjoyed bathing in the Great Salt Lake; it never occurred to me to beg an increase in my allowance, but I got a job as cash boy at two dollars a week in a department store. One of my duties was sweeping the aisle in which I operated; the first morning, I swept up and spoiled an expensive bolt of ribbon, to pay for which I had to work seven weeks without wages. By then the summer was over and, bathless, I went back to school. On several occasions I earned "two bits" by acting as supernumerary with professional companies in the Salt Lake Theater. This was one of the oldest playhouses in the United States. It was owned by the Mormon Church, and, therefore, probably was the only theater that for a considerable period began each of its performances with prayer.

In spite of these histrionic experiences, I had decided to be a dramatist rather than an actor. However, the first of my works to be given professionally was a song. Another stable in town had been turned into a theater. This was a larger barn, on a main street, and it emerged, white-painted, as Wonderland. To the end, though, a wooden horse's head over the entrance was never removed. There were two floors; paying a dime, one climbed to the upper, where one saw human skeletons, bearded ladies and a short minstrel show. Then one paid another dime, descended another flight of stairs, and witnessed a forty-minute version of *East Lynne* or *The Romany Rye*. There was some question whether the bearded ladies or the members of the nether stock company were the greater "curios." I recall a "heavy man" named George Caine,

noted for death scenes—shot through the heart, he had been known to devote ten minutes to expiring—and his really charming daughter, Georgia Caine, afterward a popular star of musical comedy. Either Georgia's legs, which were lovely, or my interest in drama may explain the fact that for me attendance at Wonderland became practically perpetual motion. With my annual pass—because of the *Evening Times*—I spent most of every Saturday climbing to the "curio hall," descending to the theater, emerging, re-entering and repeating the procedure.

I don't remember a word of the lyric I finally wrote for that minstrel show, but it was fitted to a popular air and mailed anonymously. After that, my ascents and descents were not limited to Saturdays; I went every day after school and every night after dinner. Halfway up the stairs one evening I heard an end man singing my song. That was the thrill that comes once in a lifetime! After the performance, I waited in the street to present myself to the comedian, and I don't know which was the more astonished—he at finding that the author of his lyric was a small boy, or I at discovering that even without his burnt cork my mouthpiece was one of the blackest negroes I have ever seen.

In quest of literary experience, I spent many hours hanging about the *Evening Times*, and was occasionally rewarded with a minor assignment. The Emma Abbott Opera Company opened a brief engagement at the Salt Lake Theater, and I was sent to report on the notables present. Unfortunately, the same evening had been appointed for a rehearsal in the Barnacle, so I got my list of distinguished patrons from the management early that afternoon, attended the rehearsal, wrote my story, and turned it in. A few minutes later, my father sent for me. "Did you enjoy the opera?" he asked.

Unwarned, I answered in the affirmative.

"That proves you have considerable powers of imagination," my father remarked, "because Miss Abbott is ill and there was no opera." Then he wheeled in his chair, not angry, but in deadly earnest. "I hate a liar," he said, "but, of all liars, the one who lies to the public is worst. To inform people is a great trust. I should like to think this small betrayal might be the only one in your

life; that, if you are going to be a writer, you will learn that good writing must be honest writing, and that it comes not only from a man's mind, but from his heart, his soul and his deepest conviction."

That may have been blowing up an ant hill with dynamite, but I have remembered it nearly fifty years.

About this time the family was overtaken by its first real misfortunes. John's head was crushed under a streetcar, and he survived only after a very long illness. Then I came down with typhus, and when I recovered it was to learn that my other brother, Lee, had died of diphtheria several weeks before. He was just over four years old, a grave, quiet child, but he had been very close to me. Together we had dug and planted a small vegetable garden behind our house, and arranged to sell our produce to a neighboring grocer. Every week we carried our lettuce and radishes to this customer, and even now one of my poignant recollections is of a day when, on our way home, I thought it fun to evade the little fellow and let him think himself lost. Half an hour later I found him sitting on the curb where I had left him, his pennies in hand, not in tears, but waiting in serene confidence of my return. On my first morning out of bed my grandmother took me for a drive and broke the news to me as gently as she could.

Lee, I think, had been the favorite child; neither my mother nor my grandmother ever got over his death. Father poured out his sorrow in a fine poem, and then locked himself in his room, emerging to find no distraction in work. The "gentiles" had won the last previous election; statehood had become a matter of months, and, for the moment, one writer was without deepest convictions. Utah's current executive, our friend Governor Thomas, had gone to Washington, enthusiastically vocal as to my father's part in the victory, and soon afterward, as related, the head of our house was appointed United States Consul at San Salvador. In the circumstances he was glad to go. The death of my baby sister Lillie had followed Lee's, also of diphtheria, and the expense of these illnesses had left us financially distressed. Moreover, and for all these reasons, father had lost interest in the *Times*. He had run that newspaper three years, and that was a long time for father to run anything.

Vague and brief as were our relations, my father remains, with a single exception, the strongest influence in my life. His discipline

was sporadic and prompted by moods, and his precepts were confined to rare and rather ponderous homilies, but I should think it difficult for anyone to escape the forces of his example. He was as honest a man as I ever met, and the most passionate and selfless foe of what he regarded as evil or injustice. The milk of human kindness was in my mother's blood, but whatever I have of unrest, of industry and idealism and enthusiasm, I attribute to my father and to the fact that he was a Jew.

*PEGASUS WITH PINFEATHERS*

MOTHER was always a little perplexed as to how we got home from Central America. Since infancy, her modest wants had been supplied as unfailingly and almost as miraculously as those of the Biblical children of Israel; if there had never been enough of it to suggest that money grew on trees, at least experience had proved—and was to prove—that it became available if and when needed. Throughout the forty-four years during which she was more my child than my mother, I doubt that she ever suspected any relation between labor and lucre.

Certainly, the cupboard was bare when my father died. Dr. Stubbert advanced what he could spare, I believe, but the sum wasn't sufficient to pay for the steamship tickets held for us. Mother had an idea that the wherewithal eventually came from our State Department. Mother's ideas were never too dependable; as stated, she declared frequently that she had been born during the first Battle of Bull Run, but the dates of birth and battle were some years apart, and mention of the fact merely left her confused and skeptical about history. However, as we did get home, and our government might have been embarrassed by having a friendly country permanently cluttered with the hungry progeny of an American Consul, the chances are that mother was right just this once.

Father had been equally right as to the financial troubles of his newspaper in Salt Lake. It had ceased to exist when we arrived, and its assets, if any, never found their way to our pockets. Whatever the source, mother still had a little money, and for her "sufficient unto the day" was more than sufficient. Father's life insurance



had lapsed during his last illness, but a subsequent adjustment added a few hundred dollars to our funds, and it was decided I should spend Christmas with my maternal grandmother at Belleville, Kansas. Grandmother was one of the great loves of my life, and I had been the only great love of hers, until, nearing seventy, she had embarked upon her first real romance with the father of our family physician in Omaha. After a courtship indistinguishable from that of any couple one third their age, they had married and taken up their abode in a cottage owned by Mr. Crummer.

The journey to Belleville was the first I had made unattended. Because it began Christmas Eve, there were only three other passengers—one of them a stockily built man who was interested that a fourteen-year-old lad should be traveling alone. He was still more interested, and frankly amused, when I gave him my views as to Byron and Dickens, and, at last, he inquired whether I had read *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. "Don't you think," I asked pontifically, "that detective stories are a waste of time?"

My newly made friend grinned widely. "Well, no, I don't," he said. "You see, I write 'em. My name is A. Conan Doyle."

That evening Dr. Doyle and I took advantage of an hour's stop to walk about Colorado Springs. In front of a small shop we inspected and purchased some fruit of a kind neither of us had ever seen before. The dealer called them shaddocks, and each of us ate one on our return to the train. Both of us were sick in the night, and unhesitatingly blamed what is now one of the commonest and most healthful of foods—the grapefruit. I wonder how many other things, and people, have been assailed as unjustly, and merely because they were unfamiliar. On the ship bound for Central America I had tasted my first alligator pear—then known only as abbogada—made a wry face, and exclaimed, "Ivory Soap!"

My grandmother died of a heart attack in the middle of the night shortly after the New Year. I recall running, hatless and coatless, nearly a mile for a doctor, who arrived too late. Also, I recall the physician telling Mr. Crummer that a swallow of brandy would have saved my grandmother's life—which may or may not have been true, but added heavily to the sorrow of the old gentleman, who was a total abstainer on principle and wouldn't have a drop of liquor on his premises. This marriage had been his

great romance, too, and he survived my grandmother only a few months. My clearest recollection is of sitting on my bed immediately after the funeral and wondering why I was conscious of no grief. I had been conscious of none when my father died, and yet I have kept these two tenderly wrapped in my thoughts for a lifetime. I accused myself then of insensibility, and I have repeated the accusation after the departure of many loved ones. The truth, I suspect, is that, very early in youth I learned to "take things as they come," and that we cannot lose what we love. My dear dead are more with me now than while they lived, and they are with me unchanged, forever painless and carefree and young.

It was that week in Belleville, however, that I graduated into some kind of manhood, and began making decisions of my own. Why return to Salt Lake? I thought. As the eldest male in my family I must be the breadwinner. This bread, and a wealth of cake, I meant to win—and promptly—by authorship, and I had heard my father say the place for an author was New York. The unsolved question was how I should exist there until the first loaves were delivered. Washington, my birthplace, was on the way to New York, and my mother's sister, my favorite Aunt Ella, was a government clerk in Washington. There was no doubt she would be glad to receive that literary giant of the future who was her favorite nephew. Just before my fifteenth birthday, I wrote my mother, "God helps them who help themselves; those who do not may be too much even for God"—and went to Washington.

Literary giants, I was to learn, may be born, but must be made afterward. They do not come into the world at their full stature, but are a slow growth, requiring careful pruning, fertilizing and development. It was a little difficult to induce others to see in a gawky, ignorant boy, the immediate successor of De Maupassant, Shelley and Shakespeare. My great aunt, the widow of General Berdan and mother-in-law of the novelist, F. Marion Crawford, earned my enduring resentment by declaring me to be "a conceited youngster with far too much manner." My father's newspaper had published several of my short stories, signed "C. L. P. Aged 12." With a scrapbook containing these, I called on Scott Bone, then managing editor of the *Washington Post* and later Gov-

ernor of Alaska. Kindly and patiently, he read one, called "Tom's Providence," and said, "Very promising. With schooling, experience and some hair on your upper lip, you should be good journalistic material. Come back two or three years from now, and we'll talk about it."

Aunt Ella was a comfort. She and my grandmother always had been willing to accept me at my own valuation. In that battered scrapbook containing my first short stories, I find a souvenir of her, on which I had written, "The sweetest angle on earth." The notation was made when I was seven, and to be candid, my spelling still gives editors occasional shocks. Refreshing my memory, as the lawyers say, by turning the pages of this scrapbook, I discover, with prose and verse of my own and my father's, and numerous curiosities, an undated and unkept pledge "God helping me" to "abstain from all intoxicating liquors as beverages"—relic of a religious revival in Salt Lake that made me a loudly "protesting Christian" for six months. Also, a clipping headed "What a Boy Should Learn," on which I had checked the items in which I regarded myself as proficient. The unchecked items may explain why, when my mother, my brother and sister finally reached Washington, they found me enrolled in the eighth grade at a public school.

Those first months of the year 1895 remain the blankest in my memory. Of my term in the Franklin School I recall practically nothing except the scent of a blossoming cherry tree outside the window at which I was supposed to be studying one fine spring morning. I won't say I didn't enjoy study, but I was crawling where I wanted to leap. It was intolerable that a literary giant should be sitting at a small desk, droning recitations with a group of ordinary children. I was hungry for learning, I think, but for learning of obvious value in my chosen career—and that didn't include vulgar fractions. In four years, I had written at least a hundred short stories; my scrapbook contains a letter in which, on January 4, 1893, the editor of the *National Tribune*, "The great national soldier and home weekly newspaper," promised General Berdan to use some of the stories of his "great nephew" and "pay him for them at our regular rates." In spite of family influence, nothing of mine seems to have appeared in the *National Tribune*.

Nothing seems to have appeared anywhere, and more and more I blamed education that specialized in vulgar fractions. A university was out of the question, I knew, but a good boarding school with courses in composition and literature might develop the wings of my Pegasus. Mother and the rest of her brood were financially safe for the time being; Congress had awarded her \$5,000 in recognition of my father's "heroic death at his post of duty." The money wasn't in hand, but it was certain, and I needed to earn only tuition fees. Still at the Franklin, I typed a short story almost every afternoon and night, frequently working into the small hours, and posted one almost every morning. My chickens invariably came home to roost. They were identified at a glance and quickly concealed. One self-addressed envelope was given to me in bed by my mother on a summer morning, and promptly tucked under my pillow. Opened an instant after her departure, it disgorged a brief letter and a check for \$250. I had won third or fourth prize in a short-story contest.

We began applying for school catalogues, and mother was attracted by one announcing the advantages of Bethel Military Academy, near Warrenton, Virginia. You have been informed mother was a Virginian, and she had always cherished my father's wish that I should be graduated from West Point. He had forgotten this wish in time—wisely, since there is no doubt that I should have been the world's worst soldier—but mother liked the pictures of cadets in uniform, and I liked the amazingly modest charges for tuition. At Bethel, erudition seemed to be a gift in more ways than one. The faculty included a doctor of philosophy and several masters and bachelors of art, which impressed me mightily, and I was unwarned by a sentence the recollection of which even now remains the password of the alumni: "We realize that bananas do not make bone nor sweetmeats infuse the stamina of manhood, but there is plenty of good, wholesome food."

Those last eight words proved to have been written without understanding of what growing boys call "plenty." Nothing was plentiful at Bethel except ignorance. The doctor of philosophy, a deeply religious man named Richard M. Smith, known to all of us as "Scrip Dick"—short for Scripture—and more recently a Baptist preacher in Alabama, was the single exception to this rule. Scrip

Dick had learning, with greater love and reverence for learning. Chiefly, he taught Latin, and it was no fault of his that after months of his ministrations I can recall only two Latin nouns and one declension. I remember Dr. Smith as a very mild, very kind young man, with red-rimmed eyes, sandy hair and a beard so light and sparse as to be practically invisible. We became firm friends; to almost everyone else at Bethel both of us were ridiculous, but Dick found promise in me, I found goodness and wisdom in Dick, and each of us found solace in the other. We built a mud oven in the autumn woods, and used to bake cornbread and cook eels, though I haven't the faintest recollection where we got meal or eel. Alone together, we spent comforting hours in this forest, and Scrip Dick roused my first interest in the Greek philosophers and dramatists—not in the classroom, but as the philosophers themselves gave instruction, under the trees and sky.

Many of our other teachers were half educated, incompetent, and full of corrosive envies and prejudices, directed almost equally against successful citizens, large cities and the Yankee North. In this last prejudice most of the student body shared heartily. I remember the principal of the school, Major McIntyre, telling his class about a postal ruling that letters addressed to New York were to be sent to New York City, which, the Major said, "obviously regards itself as more important than New York State."

"Isn't it possible," I piped up, "that a given number and street are to be found in the city rather than somewhere between Buffalo and Albany?"

"Two demerits for insolence," thundered the Major.

Physically, Bethel—or B. M. A.—sprawled all over the countryside. There were three two-story buildings, frame and weather-beaten: the mess hall, the school itself, and the residence of Major McIntyre. The boys occupied cabins reputed to have been built for negro slaves—eight of us in each cabin, the four rooms separated by right-angular board partitions that met at a common and central chimney. Each pair of lads foraged for the wood they stuffed into their little stove, and as most of it was pretty green, and kerosene our popular kindling, it was a dull morning when somebody's stove failed to blow off its lid and shower the other

stoves with bits of brick and mortar. Two of my immediate neighbors found themselves woodless in midwinter, and began cutting up and burning their furniture. They began with an ax and a tin-covered trunk, which naturally attracted our attention and through the inevitable peephole, as the bitter weather continued, we saw them consume their wardrobe, two chairs and bedstead, this last sacrifice reducing them to stretching their mattress upon the floor. When they removed and incinerated the boards beneath that, bridging the gap with iron pipe that had supported the roof, my roommate and I began being alarmed, but an early spring saved us from having the cabin torn down and burned to keep its insides warm—much as the fabulous starving dog is supposed to have devoured its own hind legs and stomach.

Even my juvenile vanity could not persuade me that I was popular with my fellows. I was an odd fish, beyond doubt. Because my stoop and long hair suggested cartoons of Henry Irving, the boys nicknamed me Shylock, and though they and I were ignorant of my Semitic ancestry, my sense of humor didn't respond. I challenged no admiration in the classroom, and certainly none on the parade ground, where we spent wintry dawns, our fingers numb against the cold steel—the very cold steel—of our rifles. I resisted regimentation, as I have done ever since, and held to opinions that were heretical and incendiary. My outstanding hero was Col. Robert G. Ingersoll, then considered a dangerous atheist, though many of his skepticisms are now orthodox. (Who defined radicals as men who dig trenches to be occupied later by conservatives?) As a child I had heard Ingersoll defend a woman who had murdered her common-law husband on the night of his more formal marriage to another woman. My father took me to this proceeding, at which, I believe, Ingersoll made his then-famous rejoinder to the judge who asked whether he was “trying to show contempt for this court.”

“On the contrary,” the Colonel replied, “I’m doing my utmost to conceal it.”

I had read and reread *Some Mistakes of Moses*—I who so recently, Judas-like, had accepted a red apple from my grandmother as the price of abandoning an evangelical career already begun in a neighboring chapel—and a steel engraving of the author hung in

my room. This picture was a thorn in the side of Bethel. I was warned to remove it, and ignored the warning.

The boys were neither better nor worse than most, but to an embryo Shelley they seemed a rough lot. They were, like the rest of us, inclined to resentment of even fancied superiority, and intolerant of any view contrary to their own. Moreover, they were addicted to rather cruel practical jokes—one of these a classic in the school and countryside, that had been rehearsed and performed annually from the early days of the institution. It was “as good as a play,” and as carefully prepared, and I regret that space forbids its being described in detail. Since these memoirs really mustn’t run to the length of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, suffice it to say that one midnight I found myself locked in my cabin with the bloody and apparently dead body of my roommate, while evidence that I was his murderer accumulated amazingly and a howling mob outside demanded my immediate execution. I was being hustled out to my doom when someone disclosed that the blood was red ink, and the whole mimicry, which had lasted four hours, an ingenious hoax. An earlier experience with a victim who had lost consciousness when a noose was fastened about his neck and the rope swung over a tree explained in my case what everyone regarded as an inartistic ante-climax.

In spite of these things Bethel was not altogether disagreeable, and, in proportion, probably turned out as many useful citizens as Harvard or Yale. That I learned little there was largely my own fault; one finds anywhere, I suspect, what one seeks with sufficient diligence. The hardships may have been good for us; certainly they were no more damaging than the fraternities and other indulgences of expensive universities. Anyway, the truth of the axiom, “As the twig is bent the tree will grow,” must depend partly upon the twig. One hears a great deal these days about underprivileged children and the ruinous effects of sordid early environment, but some of the “dead-end kids” seem to do quite as well in maturity as the rich men’s sons, who had every “advantage.” We had enjoyable times at Bethel, and though I lacked the qualities of a soldier, leaving the corps as I entered it, a private in the rear ranks, I probably profited from the exercise and discipline of the parade ground.

For ravenous youth the worst affliction was our diet. Bananas may not make bone, but most of us were conspicuously possessed of that, and if sweetmeats do not infuse the stamina of manhood, neither does a diet consisting chiefly of bread and molasses. We learned to rob neighboring henhouses of eggs, which we ate raw, and ingenious lads baited hooks with corn and fished from their windows for the Major's chickens, which we stewed in washbasins on top of our stoves. Somebody invented competitive drills, at which those who were skilled in the manual of arms won the rations of those who weren't, and, as catch-commands always baffled me, after that I never seemed to eat at all. Warrenton, our nearest town, was in the heart of the hunting country, and three or four prosperous county families made a practice of entertaining the cadets in turn for week ends. When their invitations came early, some of the boys made a chalk mark for each intervening day, and rubbed it out as the day passed.

Unfortunately for me, the invitations were sent in alphabetic order, and my name begins with a P. How I wished I might have been called Aaron Aaborn! However, at last my week end rolled round. I couldn't go for dinner Friday because I had guard duty. That was our punitive system at Bethel; you walked an hour for every two demerits, and as I always had demerits to spare, if justice prevailed I should be walking still. Friday guard duty was rotten luck, but after all it left me with definite dinner arrangements for Saturday and Sunday. As was the custom, I had borrowed one of the commandant's horses, and from the beginning of my last lap to the home of my host my progress was practically continuous.

It was ten o'clock before I reached my destination, and *was* I hungry! Late suppers were unknown in that period and vicinity, but, having been received cordially, I retired to consider what we were likely to have for breakfast. About four in the morning I awoke under a necessity that my Victorian upbringing prevents me describing in print. Clad in nightshirt and trousers, I made my way through the darkness to one of those architectural triumphs formerly common at the end of boardwalks. Its door, constructed of vertical planks nailed to horizontal crosspieces, had been swollen by rains, and, after failing to push it open with my palm, I admin-



istered a mighty kick, entered and banged the door behind me.

Even in the black interior of that little hut I became aware instantly that I wasn't alone. To be frank, even at the expense of delicacy, my companion was a lady. In fact she proved to be the daughter of the house. Apologizing hastily, I turned to go. That swollen door had been kicked *in*, but it couldn't be pulled *out*. With growing horror and alarm, I clawed at its edge until my fingernails were broken, and then I gave up and sat down. There really didn't seem much else to do.

Neither could I think of anything to talk about. Silence was oppressive, and somehow more embarrassing than speech, but what *could* one say? Sound money or "free silver" was the question of the day, but that didn't seem a very good subject under the circumstances. So we sat gloomily side by side—the daughter of the house and I, strangers except for the formal greetings of a few hours ago—a frightened girl of fifteen or sixteen, and an equally frightened lad of the same age, in an era when a man might be horsewhipped for referring to stockings or corsets in a lady's presence. As I reflected in dejected discomfort, if I escaped with nothing worse than a whipping I'd be as lucky as Bill Nye's friend who "held five aces and only got shot in the leg." My adventure with the mob had been sufficiently recent to inspire the reflection that for less than this people had been lynched in the South.

We were cold, too, though I'm not certain it was chill that made my teeth chatter. Once or twice my fellow-prisoner implored me to "try that door again." Five or six times I did try, without making the least impression either on the door or—I'm afraid—on the lady. There was undisguised contempt in at least one of her comments. "My father could smash those planks with one blow," she said, and somehow I found the remark not too reassuring. With approaching dawn the outline and then the detail of my companion's appearance became discernible. Incredible as it may seem, I hadn't the faintest idea whether she was blonde or brunette, pretty or ill-favored. I recall that her skirt was white—a nightgown, probably. When it comes to feminine pulchritude, I am far from insensitive. But, like the successive small holes through which a ball drops before a safe can be opened,

the combination of time, place and girl requires, for attractiveness, something that was lacking in this situation.

The half-moon window high in our eastern wall was diffusing pinkish light when we heard someone whistling outside. "That's Uncle Ben," guessed my companion, adding in reply to my anxious inquiry that Uncle Ben was seventy, black, and an old retainer. "I'll stand behind the door; you call him, and say *you've* been shut in; then take him away and I'll get to my room without being seen." Women are wonderful; I shouldn't have thought of that in ten thousand years.

The plan worked, too, but, safe in my own chamber, our situation lost none of its dreadfulness. We should have to face each other at breakfast; under the circumstances, could any gentleman subject any lady to that embarrassment? We were scarcely more than children, mind you, and this was in 1896. I wrote a note to explain that I had been "called home," persuaded Uncle Ben to saddle my borrowed horse, and dinnerless, breakfastless, bereft of all the dinners and breakfasts and luncheons that were to have been part of that long and eagerly awaited week end, I mounted and rode back to school.

A quarter of a century later, in Richmond, where I had gone to inspect a company presenting my play *The Fool*, a man called me on the phone. "You don't know me," he said, "but you met my wife many years ago—her name was Ruth Brown—and will you dine with us?" I'm inventing the name, because, as you may have surmised, the lady was none other than my companion of that subductive adventure near Warrenton. Her husband proved to be a delightful person of local importance. There were fourteen at table, and when coffee was served, my hostess asked for the attention of the company and remarked, "George and I think you may be interested in hearing that I've owed our guest this dinner for more than twenty-five years." From there, she went on to relate the whole story, which created unmixed amusement. *Autres temps, autres mœurs.*

One night not long after my amputated week end, I returned to my cabin to find the furniture in ruins. The internals of my mattress, bought at some sacrifice to replace the school's bag of

straw, were strewn over my smashed bed on which were the remains of my armchair, one leg of which impaled the still-smiling face of Colonel Ingersoll. Tremulous with anger, I went straight to Major McIntyre. "You were warned," he said.

"Then you'll do nothing about it?" said I.

"Certainly not."

"All right," I declared; "I'm leaving."

"I'll write to your mother," the Major threatened.

"My mother didn't send me here," was my retort. "I sent me, and I'm quitting now."

"You can't do that," the Major answered. "There's no conveyance to take you to Warrenton, and no train out of Warrenton until tomorrow."

"I'm quitting now, nevertheless," I said—and did. Walking five miles and waiting six hours, I never returned to the cabin, and only once to Bethel. *That* was after the production of my first successful play, and during one of the school's last commencements. Major McIntyre, at whose urgent invitation I had come, presented me to the cadet corps as having been "from his first week here, quite plainly the most promising student ever graduated from Bethel."

Major Mac, who died shortly afterward—though not from the shock of that discovery—might not have been surprised, forty years later, at hearing my alleged graduation discussed at Colgate University. The dean there had taken refuge in the mention of Bethel in the sketch of me in *Who's Who* in his despair of finding any other academic background for the citation accompanying an honorary degree. Major McIntyre was a man of prolific imagination and vast pride in his school. If he and it had survived, and my degree had been Doctor of Divinity, I have no doubt the fact would have been ascribed to my enforced separation from poor punctured Colonel Ingersoll.

## "THE AGE OF INNOCENCE"

SITTING all night alone in the railway station at Warrenton, I asked myself questions and answered them. What was it I wanted? Training. Training for what? To know life and report it. Why had I expected to get that at Bethel? Or at any other school? What could the men there know of life or of writing? "He who can, does; he who can't, teaches." "Book learning" I could acquire myself; the capacity to see, and to feel and think, were not to be had secondhand. For obvious reasons, Scott Bone had been unwilling to pay me while I accumulated experience; would he be willing to provide the experience—the training—at my expense? I had been willing to pay for schooling; why shouldn't I work my way through the more practical course to be had on a newspaper? Anyway, since my funds were almost exhausted, I had to work somewhere, and soon.

The managing editor of the *Washington Post* laughed when I walked into his office—and no wonder. I was as tall as I am now, an inch under six feet, and I weighed 116 pounds. The down Mr. Bone had demanded adorned my upper lip, but so thinly as to suggest washing rather than shaving. I wore an outgrown suit of civilian clothes, and a military overcoat with brass buttons and a red-lined cape. This remained my only overcoat for years, and became historic. Actors I had met in those days, and to whom I recalled myself decades later, remarked, "Of course, I remember you; the gawky boy in the red-lined overcoat!" Don Marquis, the humorist, who was my colleague then, subsequently told a group at The Players in New York that I looked like something to be carried at the head of a May Day parade.

My agreement with Mr. Bone was quite simple; I received nothing a week, and was worth it. That is, for a time. I had no typewriter or desk of my own, but floated about like a flag or a flame, lighting on any desk or typewriter temporarily unused. Our city editor was a veteran named Walker whose upstanding hair matched the lining of my cape, and who plainly regarded me as punishment for his sins. For weeks he kept me running to interview bereaved families and writing two-column obituaries, which he cut to ten lines. More and more I felt that natural death afforded inadequate scope for my talents. What I wanted was a good murder, and at last I was sent to "cover" one at Chevy Chase. This was "of a Sunday," when news was scarce, and on the ground, and in possession of the facts, I foresaw Walker's chagrin at learning that shooter and shot were both Negroes. In Washington then—and, I suppose now—that kind of homicide was reported in a sentence: "John Smith, colored, aged 22, shot and killed Frank Jones, also colored, aged 26." My great chance had fizzled, and Walker was likely to blame me more than John Smith.

Fortunately, Washington had just been the disappointed host to a Christian Endeavor Convention, of the delegates to which our merchants said that "they arrived with a ten-dollar bill and a shirt, and changed neither." Christianity was momentarily unpopular in Washington, and returning from Chevy Chase in the patrol wagon, or Black Maria, I was overjoyed to observe a Christian Endeavor button in the lapel of this unsatisfactory assassin. "When did you get religion?" I asked.

"Last night."

"And what did you do then?"

"Well, then I met a yellow girl, and she got religion, too, and we had a little liquor, and went home together, and her husband came back unexpected and pulled a razor and I shot him."

That story made the front page, but produced no raise of salary. Mother was undisturbed. She still had part of her \$5,000 from Congress, and would have spent the last penny on me without question. To her, I was not a returned prodigal, but a returned manuscript—one of *her* chickens come home to roost—and a very little revision might make it immortal. Outside office hours I still wrote stories and plays, and one or two of the former added leanly to

the family fortunes. When mother took a friend's word as to some gold-mining stock that proved worthless, I pasted the ornate certificates on my wall, wondered what I should do if the decoration suddenly acquired value, and sold the resultant short story for \$50—except for my prize money, the largest amount I had ever had at one time. Our small flat in the Garfield Apartments, at Thirteenth and I Streets, N. W., was always full of more-or-less bogus notables, including one cherished for years who called herself Lady Blank, spoke freely of her intimates at the Court of St. James's, but was conspicuously omitted from Burke's *Peerage*. My kind mother no more questioned her friends than she questioned her children; we were all perfect denizens of a nearly perfect world. She was the sort of woman you want to take in your arms and assure that whatever she did, or anyone else did, was right, and wouldn't have mattered if it hadn't been. Her offspring were *always* alluding to her as "poor mother," and I still wonder why. She trod softly, gaily, happily through most of her life, wrapped in cellophane, with her heart and its hurts showing through, depending upon other people, believing everything they said of themselves, and adding what they seemed to lack of fame, fortune, drama, or romance.

Washington in 1896 was a provincial city, beautifully planned but not yet executed. The population was about 200,000; one-third of it, I thought, office-holders, and the other two-thirds office-seekers. Charles Hoyt, our most successful writer of farce, immensely successful then and now quite forgotten, had just typified both groups amusingly and pathetically in *A Texas Steer*. Everywhere magnificent public buildings stood among dilapidated frame shacks, many of them occupied by Negroes. The impressive breadth of Pennsylvania Avenue, stretched between the unsurpassed Capitol and the Treasury Department, was bordered on one side by low brick or wooden structures, and on the other by the red-light district. This populous and not unpopular quarter sprawled over the site on which at one time during the Civil War camped Hooker's Division. Because these soldiers attracted the usual followers, our segregated section was called The Division, and everywhere a prostitute was known as a "Hooker." Ironically, except

for that, millions of our citizens might never have heard of "Fighting Joe."

Professional prostitution, I suspect, prospers best in a strait-laced society. On that and kindred subjects I have deep convictions, but this is scarcely the place for them. We may pause briefly, however, to contemplate the *autres temps, autres mœurs* to which I have referred in the previous chapter. Modern youth, doubting my assertion that "a man might be horsewhipped for referring to stockings or corsets in a lady's presence," have no conception of the rigid code of those days. Females wore skirts that, literally, swept the streets, and—believe it or not—I was five years old when, blundering upon Aunt Ella in her chemise, I discovered that women are bipeds. Until then I had thought them shaped like Mrs. Noah of my toy Noah's Ark, whose wooden crinolines had two feet glued to their lower extremity. Until I left Washington at the turn of the century, theatrical lithographs publicly posted and picturing ladies in knee-length skirts were illegal unless strips of paper were pasted over the legs—thus inspiring an interest in anatomy that might not have existed otherwise. A girl friend of mine in that period forfeited my esteem by lifting her skirt to her ankles and asking me to tie her boot, and—again, believe it or not—as recently as 1910 our seaside community at Shoreham, Long Island, was equally shocked by the first woman we had ever seen in a bathing suit without stockings. She was Margaret Lawrence, sister of Harriot Stanton Blatch, the suffragist, and the entire village called her Bare-legged Mag.

There were only three gifts one could send to the fair sex without inviting disaster—books, candy and flowers. The impression left by this rule was so strong that twenty years later I had to suppress myself when an old friend, who owned silk mills, presented my daughter with two chiffon nightgowns. Like Gaul, in my youth all femininity was divided into three parts—those with whom you could "take liberties," those with whom you couldn't, and those you were about to marry. "Liberties" chiefly meant osculatory exercise. My constant companion at the theater in Washington was one of the several damsels with whom, in succession, I fancied myself to be in love. Not long ago after I had lectured at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, her husband, a professor in that

university, and their grown son took me home for supper. Seeing her again after forty years, I shook hands with Addie. "Aren't you going to kiss her?" the husband asked, and I did—for the first time in my life. Another girl friend of my newspaper days, with whom I think I was really in love, resided in Mount Pleasant, a suburb four or five miles from the church we attended together every Sunday. Her brother, who worked with me, was my intimate and admired comrade, Alan D. Albert, subsequently President of Rotary International. Many hours elapsed between my leaving home and returning there, after midday dinner with the Alberts, but I never risked even the euphemism that I wanted to wash my hands. Nature's laws or their infraction were not discussed in mixed company. Oscar Wilde came to trial in 1895; I hadn't the remotest notion of what he was accused, and few of my social circle were better informed. . . . None of which, I repeat, diminished the prosperity of Hooker's Division. It was only when the amateurs came in that the professionals went out.

We are told now that this was "the age of innocence," "the mauve decade," and "the gay nineties." As a matter of fact, it was no more innocent or mauve or gay, in an ironic sense, than our own age. It was a simpler age undoubtedly; a sober, industrious age, distinguished by widespread contentment. We were sure of ourselves and our future. We felt no urge to elevate ourselves to a spurious superiority by cultivating contempt for the manners, morals and mentality of earlier generations. The bangs, bustles and bouffant sleeves of the late eighties had been odd enough, goodness knows, but I recall no disposition to regard them as the visible signs of an immature and feeble-minded race. Perhaps we foresaw that our own fashions might seem funny by 1942, as, apparently, 1942 does not foresee that its women's hats, for example, may be thought ludicrous, and indicative of a certain vacuity beneath, by 1988—or possibly even before that.

Ours was far from being a perfect world. There was grinding poverty and toil, as I am afraid there will be for centuries to come, but we were moving steadily toward ameliorations that were checked afterward, I think, by unwise legislation, as our progress in temperance was checked by an equally unwise constitutional amendment. If many of our codes were absurd, in those days we



could still class militant prohibitionists, advocates of worthless currency, and other starry-eyed reformers as "freaks." Gentlemen did not smoke or swear in the presence of ladies, and no one had considered the prospect that ladies might smoke or swear in the presence of gentlemen. If flaming youth flamed then as now—and it probably did—it flamed less conspicuously. Agreeing with those who point out that pent-up powder explodes most violently, I incline to believe there may be as much danger in removing all restrictions against loose powder—or loose conduct. There must be a middle course combining freedom with discipline.

I certainly do not mean to suggest that lust and greed were unknown until recently. They *were* held in check, to a degree, by the greater homeliness of our lives, by the force of public opinion, and by the smaller number of incitements and temptations. Our needs were fewer. There were practically no taxes; the government functioned and kept out of debt on revenue from what we smoked and drank, or brought in from abroad. For years my top salary was \$15 a week, for which I worked as much as 84 hours, but, like most of my fellows, I was conscious of neither resentment nor envy. If I went on working that way, I thought, some day when I was worth more I'd earn more, but meanwhile I was incredulous when a visiting press agent told me *his* salary was a hundred dollars a week. Nobody but captains of industry had such an income, I felt sure, and if there were other exceptions, what on earth did they do with it? Many of our modern answers to that question remained unsuspected. My two most complete failures as a prophet attended my first inspections of a motor car and a movie. The motor car was practically static, which is more than could be said of the trees and houses in the movie; I remember calling the car "a useless toy," and revealing, through the *Post*, that the movie was "an interesting experiment, without commercial or entertainment value."

A crucial moment for me arrived when Willard Holcomb, our dramatic editor, dropped into the city room to ask for an assistant. "There are seven theaters here now," he complained. "All of them change their bills every Monday, and no one man can cover seven performances the same day. You'll have to lend me someone from your staff."

Walker snorted, "I can't spare a good reporter."

"Who said anything about a *good* reporter?" asked Holcomb, and, somehow, in that instant, I knew that I had become a critic. Two days later I was setting histrionic standards and giving the world's leading dramatists what they needed in the way of advice. It was sometime afterward that A. M. Palmer, who had made a great reputation as manager of the famous Union Square Theater, first shook my conviction that anybody who is given a typewriter and a column headed "The Drama" becomes, by that act, a sacrosanct and unerring judge of art. At luncheon, Palmer asked me, "Do you think you are always right about actors and plays?"

I admitted infallibility.

Palmer, an old man then, smiled a mellow and understanding smile. "Then you're wasting your time on a newspaper," he said. "You ought to be worth a million dollars a year to any producer in New York."

Except when "Hokey" had other fish to fry, my initial assignments were unimportant. I had printed a card reading "C. L. L. POLLOCK, DRAMATIC CRITIC, THE WASHINGTON POST," and tossed off a few profound observations as to Julia Marlowe and Arthur Wing Pinero. Ordinarily, throughout several months, my beat was the vaudeville theater, the burlesque house, Kernan's, where I acquired a vulgar and enduring inclination to that type of entertainment, the homes of popular-priced melodrama, and that ten-twenty-thirty temple of Thespis, the Bijou. There I won my first spurs at an exhibition provided by the Cherry Sisters. These ladies, if memory serves, originated in Iowa, and in the beginning probably took themselves seriously as variety artists. Shortly, however, they must have discovered that no one else did, and have resigned themselves to cashing in on their ineptitude. Crowds came, not so much to witness the performance as to contribute to it. What they contributed was mostly over-ripe eggs and vegetables. Thus the modern sport of "guying" burlesques of ancient melodramas is not quite as modern as "we moderns" believe it to be. Indeed the idea was not new in my youth; long before, James Owen O'Connor had played Hamlet behind a net that shielded him from obsolete produce.

The audience at the Bijou had the advantage of being in a theater built above a market. "It may have come to inspect," I

wrote, "but it remained to project. It threw everything that was not nailed down. . . . The program states that 'the Cherry Sisters ran fourteen weeks in New York.' If last night was a fair example of the treatment to be accorded them, only remarkable courage will keep them from having an equally long run here." Walker, until then skeptical as to my capacity, congratulated me on that bit of humor.

Vaudeville in '96 was much the same as now, though richer in talent and well-known names, and burlesque devoted more attention to episode than to epidermis. Its critics protested "indecent exposure," but what was exposed then was chiefly cotton or silk underwear. The trade name for this was, and still may be "full tights." Ladies covered by them from ankles to neck were advertised as "Living Pictures," and the community was shocked and financially responsive. Popular-priced melodrama differed only in opulence and spaciousness from most current movies. Where the former furnished one or two murders, the latter provide massacres, and where the idle rich of that earlier era dwelt in canvas rather than marble halls, the cinema capitalists occupy mansions resembling the Grand Central Station, but the formula isn't much altered otherwise. Boy loved girl and the villain still pursued her in the days of Theodore Kremer and the nascent Owen Davis. Sex was served in *Why Women Sin* and *The Queen of the White Slaves*, while equally primitive appetites were satisfied with *Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl* and *Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model*. This latter opus had what I still regard as a fine example of unconscious humor. In the first act the villain tossed Nellie off Brooklyn Bridge; in the second he struck her with a belying pin and dropped her from a yacht in midocean; in the third he placed her, bound hand and foot, beneath a descending elevator, and in the fourth, when our heroine shrunk from his amatory advances, he asked, "Why do you fear me, Nellie?"

My good fortune was that Holcomb didn't like work. This is a disinclination almost wholly peculiar to man. The ants and the bees, the birds and beasts toil from sunrise to sunset without visible sign of a longing for leisure. "Hokey" wrote as little as possible, and I wrote as much. The result was inevitable. Before his death this talented man, of whom I had stood in the greatest awe, was

haunting my office in search of a job, and receiving other help instead because I could not give him work I knew he wouldn't do. Very shortly I became in fact dramatic editor of the *Post*, while "Hokey" drew the salary. That satisfied both of us. I had few wants, and my interest in money ended when they were supplied. The truth about the bees and the ants and me may be that we are lucky enough to be engaged in labor we enjoy. I have never found anything else I did enjoy as completely, and the only really wretched days I remember were three successive Sundays before I rebelled against doctor's orders to rest on the Sabbath. "Hokey" reviewed the most important play each Monday, and contributed a weekly feature captioned "Post Facto Opinions." I dealt with most of the other six attractions, and filled the remaining ten columns allotted us on Sunday. In addition I contributed a series of "Stage Stories," consisting chiefly—and plentifully—of fiction I was unable to sell elsewhere.

Utterly ignorant of the history, literature and technique of drama and acting, I had two qualities that make for good criticism—enthusiasm and reverence. Long afterward, when I quoted, "Criticism is the adventures of a soul among masterpieces," and Percy Hammond, of the New York *Herald Tribune*, suggested, "First, one must find the masterpieces," I answered, "No, first one must find the soul." Badly as I treated it in my youth, and perhaps in my later years, I loved the theater. Never was inheritance plainer than in the combination of my father's urge to write and my mother's to dramatize. I had a third quality more common in critics and less helpful to criticism—the ambition to write plays. Sent to review the first performance anywhere of Augustus Thomas' *The Hoosier Doctor*, Holcomb discovered me, half an hour after the final curtain, sitting at my desk lost in melancholy thought. "What's the matter?" he inquired.

"Oh," I answered, "I'll never be able to write a play as good as that!"

The following morning I saw Thomas for the first time. He was wearing knickers, and had got off his bicycle within a few feet of me, but I shouldn't have dared speak to him. Augustus Thomas was then the blazing sun in the firmament of our theater. He had created, or was to create, such successes as *Alabama*, *In*

*Mizzoura, Arizona* and *The Witching Hour*; anyone would have been flattered by his acquaintance, and perhaps, it was a holdover from the feeling I had then that to the end of his days in neglect and oblivion I was honored by his friendship and immensely proud of it. If anybody had told me that night that I should live to call the author of *The Hoosier Doctor* Gus, I should have regarded the prophecy as an evidence of insanity.

It is needless to say that I never ceased writing plays. "How to Win a Girl," of unblest memory, was only the start of a long, long procession that was half a century passing a given point. At sixteen, I achieved and acted in my first production, a "one-act character sketch" called *The Stepping Stones*, performed at a benefit in the old Grand Opera House. In case anyone may be interested, the date was May 16, 1896, and the program quotes "Book Review" as saying of this opus, "While 'The Stepping Stones' is by no means the best of Mr. Pollock's plays, it reveals masterly drawing of characters and feelings." I suspect that the author of "Mr. Pollock's plays" was also the author of this criticism. After the performance a lady presented me with a gold watch, suitably inscribed, which proved to have been purchased with funds borrowed from my mother.

*The Stepping Stones* actually won a second hearing—and "by request"—May 20 at the Bijou, "presented by the author and the same cast that appeared at the Grand Opera House," the program boasts. This repetition ended my career as a dramatist until a year after in New York, when, as shall be disclosed later, my first professional performance ran into disaster. In the interim, I completed two full-length works, a farce named *That Other Brown*, which never got far from my desk, and a melodrama, entitled *A Game of Hearts*, which was rewritten nine times and remains one of the worst plays in history. This isn't unusual; I still believe that when a play has to be rewritten the best course is to tear it up and begin another. In my opinion, the most damaging axiom of the theater is Dion Boucicault's "Plays are not written, but rewritten." The best-built drama is like a house of cards; disturb one card, and the whole structure falls. Boucicault's phrase continues to be the halter by which managers lead authors to their own destruction.

*A Game of Hearts*, which finally was produced in New York where it lasted just long enough to be listed in *Who's Who* as my maiden effort, served me best as an exercise. Through it, I discovered a method of learning the trade that I have recommended in lectures at numerous universities. One after another I read acknowledged masterpieces, gave myself time to forget everything but a bare outline of plot, and then made a scenario of that story as I should have written it. Finally, I compared my work with the original, observing that this character was superfluous or that scene out of its proper order. In all, I made about two hundred of these scenarios—a course in dramaturgy that filled nearly seven thousand pages. I still regret having destroyed the lot in order to travel light when I left Washington.

What I required most, of course, was actual experience in living—an experience not to be gained by journeying through life as tourists used to wander through France and England. Until my apprenticeship on the *Post* I had known few people whose existences weren't humdrum, and most of these only casually. My fellow journalists were revelations to me. I listened to their reminiscences with eagerness, and lost no opportunity to be in their company. There was Joe O'Brien, our best police reporter, later well known in New York and husband of the novelist Mary Heaton Vorse. Joe not only recited tall tales, but lived 'em. I recall one night in the Post Restaurant, our chief and cheap eating place, when Joe got into a row with a waiter, and, struck over the head with a bottle, staggered to the pavement covered with gore that proved to be catsup. In line of duty Joe was acquainted with every crook and trollop in town, and while then and forever after I was outside the school of thought that believes the worst citizens make the best literature, I began accumulating grist that afterward flowed from my forgotten mill.

Two of the best stories I know came of what should be, but are not, regretted friendships with ladies who lived in Hooker's Division. The second of these stories must await more space in a subsequent chapter; the first was a girl's answer—truthful, I think, this time—to the usual question as to why she chose her calling. "It was because of a field of daisies," she said, and went on to explain that she had been employed picking slate from coal at a chute

in Pennsylvania. "I almost never saw the sun," she declared. "Winter mornings we went to work long before it rose, and finished long after it set. One warm spring day I overslept, and scared to death at thought of losing my job, ran at top speed toward the colliery. There was a short cut I had never taken before, because it crossed private property, but I took it now, and suddenly found myself in that field.

"I'd never seen anything like it; millions of daisies, nodding and winking their yellow eyes at me in the sunlight. I knelt and held them close, and then I thought of the dust and grime and darkness around the coal chute, and I said, 'I'm never going back there again,' and I never did."

A quarter of a century after that, Alice Leclair's sentence, "I almost never saw the sun," became the keynote of a widely discussed scene in my play *The Fool*. "I wanna see sun!" Umanski, the coal miner, cried at a meeting with his bosses. "I never see him. Go to the mines—him not up. Work in mines—him not see. Go home—him gone." Alice herself was the prototype of the play's Magdalen, Pearl Hennig. It is a confusing reflection that if *The Fool* had any helpful influence, part of that good came out of my evil associations in Washington. Another and larger part was the result of reading a life of St. Francis of Assisi. Of such mixtures are life, and literature, and, perhaps, the Kingdom of Heaven.

## I LEARN A TRADE

N OBODY knows how Washington felt crossing the Delaware, but if we are to judge by his attitude in the celebrated painting it wasn't the least as I felt crossing the Hudson to invade Manhattan. My lifelong friend, Paul Wiltach, then dramatic editor of the *Washington Times*, and afterward an author of note, had got me a tentative proposal from the New York *Dramatic Mirror*, and in 1897 I sallied forth to conquer the Metropolis.

The exact date is lost to history but it was a cold, rainy morning, and I had spent the night in a day coach. Reaching Jersey City at what should have been dawn, and wholly ignorant of the big town, I boarded the nearest ferry and landed at Liberty Street—then and now, perhaps, the most uninspiring entrance to New York. Then and now, a cheap, shabby, three or four-story hotel stood on the corner opposite the ferry slip, and there, at the cost of twenty cents, I breakfasted. Thus fortified, I carried my bag and a typewriter in a tin case to the elevated railway, and in a car drawn by a small, puffy steam engine, went to the office of the *Mirror* at Fortieth Street and Broadway. The ratification of my employment depended upon what impression I made on the journal's owner and editor, Harrison Grey Fiske, and always cautious, I had no plans for domicile.

It was Mr. Fiske's misfortune to be known chiefly as the husband of the actress, Minnie Maddern Fiske, though his own achievements were considerable. I recall him as a stout man with blue or gray eyes and sandy hair, and the awe I felt in his presence that morning continued through a long association with some reversal of fortunes. If Mr. Fiske was amused by my appearance that day,



he dissembled kindly, and so far as I remember, asked only two questions: Did I know my way about New York and did I understand that my salary was to be \$15 a week? To the first, I replied that I would know my way before night, and when the second arose, I dissembled, believing it unwise to let my employer suspect that I regarded the sum as munificent. I got the job, a desk in a back room, and a map of New York which I studied so assiduously that within an hour I could have gone straight to any address between Washington Square and the Battery—a feat I have never been able to perform since.

Carfare being a consideration under the circumstances, I was fortunate in finding my geographical range rather more limited. I paid \$7.50 a week for two meals a day and a hall bedroom at 116 West Seventieth Street, and, following my father's example, walked to and from work. Midday provender was shared with my colleagues at a free-lunch counter across the way from our office. Including a very special blowout every Saturday, that came to fifty cents a week. With economy as to laundry and incidentals, I was able to put aside \$10 with which to return to Washington if and when my homesickness got too bad, and to send my mother \$5 out of each pay envelope. Mother's capital had dwindled sadly, and with my brother and sister to be fed and clothed she needed whatever help I could give. As to my own private nest egg, I hadn't the faintest intention of retracing my steps, but it was comforting to know that I could if I wished. I had suffered from nostalgia at Bethel, but nothing like that of my first few months in New York. Except for the boys at the office I knew no one, and some of my readers may have discovered the possibility of being lonely in the midst of a crowd. I used to look out of the window at passing pedestrians, and think, "Not one of them cares whether I live or die."

Almost none of our staff earned more than I. With a single exception they were young men, clever, well educated and quite without ambition. The exception was Albert Ellery Bergh, who seemed elderly to us—he may have been forty-five—and who had edited some kind of dictionary or reference work. George Taggart, whom we admired most, wrote the words of a popular song, "The Moth and the Flame," and its success ruined him; he never accom-

plished anything else. Our labors were strictly routine, but we had great pride in our periodical and an amazing *esprit de corps*. The *Mirror* at that time was the most dignified of three weekly trade journals of the theater. The other two were the *Dramatic News* and the *Clipper*, which latter alone survived the appearance of our first daily competitor, the *Morning Telegraph*, which in turn succumbed to the rivalry of the less decorous but racy and enterprising weekly called *Variety*. The *Clipper* was almost prehistoric; it specialized in fairs, circuses and carnivals, and we pretended contempt for it that we were far from feeling. All three papers featured "routes," giving the whereabouts of companies on tour, and each staff suspected the other two of cribbing—a suspicion in which, I regret to say, all three were entirely justified. We caught the *Clipper* red-handed when it listed the "Root-Keaf Stock Company," and we were able to point out that we had created this organization by phonetic spelling and a rearrangement of letters in the words "Fake Route." Taggart, who had laid the trap, got very drunk that night.

News for the *Dramatic Mirror* largely consisted of the information that Mlle Ario, the celebrated wire-walker, was recovering from bronchitis, or that Tessie Twinkletoes, the equally popular soubrette, had been engaged for a musical comedy. Every Monday we went in search of these vital statistics, each of us on his own beat. Mine was Longacre Square, which later was divided between Times Square and Duffy Square—named for that gallant chaplain of the First World War, Father Francis Patrick Duffy, who became my staunch friend. Father Duffy was a genial soul, with an all-embracing sense of humor; I often wonder what he would say if he could see himself in bronze at the end of a thoroughfare named for him. Longacre Square was considered too far uptown for theaters. Much of it, including the land now covered by the Hotel Astor, was occupied by the brownstone-front residences so long typical in New York, and most of these were theatrical boarding houses. Every Monday I rang all their doorbells and asked all their landladies for tidings of Mlle Ario and Tessie Twinkletoes. Late Monday night we went to press, and the rest of the week we gleaned these items from the daily newspapers.

"The Gay Rialto in New York," as the amusement district was

called in a popular song, began with the Star Theater, at Thirteenth Street and Broadway, and practically ended with the Empire, which was next door to us, and still stands on Broadway at Fortieth Street. Between these two were a dozen or more theaters of national reputation. The Union Square, where Palmer had presided, Clara Morris had played, and Richard Mansfield first attracted attention by his performance of Baron Chevrial in *A Parisian Romance*, survived as a variety house. As will appear later, it also survived one single representation of the first play of mine to be given professionally. Of the other theaters, the most famous of course was Daly's, still managed then by Augustin Daly, and the home of the great stock company that, at one time or another, included Ada Rehan, John Drew, Mrs. G. H. Gilbert, Henry E. Dixey and Tyrone Power, distinguished father of the movie star of today. Daly's only rival was Daniel Frohman's company at the old Lyceum, on Fourth Avenue between Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Streets, which boasted E. H. Sothorn, W. J. Le Moynes, Herbert Kelcey, Effie Shannon, Henry Miller and Georgia Cayvan. There were no theaters on Forty-second Street, afterward heart of the district, and the huge Olympia, which stretched from Forty-fourth to Forty-fifth Street on Broadway, was called "Hammerstein's Folly." Oscar Hammerstein had erected the building in 1895; it included a roof garden, a music hall and a theater, subsequently christened the Criterion, that opened in 1899 with Chester Bailey Fernald's sensational play *The Cat and the Cherub*. People spoke of the Olympia as being "in the wilderness"; whether or not that explained its ill fortune is uncertain, but the venture provided a very low down in the long list of ups and downs in the career of that remarkable genius known to us as "Oom Oscar."

The theatrical business was even less a business and more a game of chance in those days than now—unbelievable as that may seem to the initiated. There were nearly five thousand theaters in the country, and their attractions were supplied by numerous booking agents, most of them irresponsible and many having no offices except under their hats. The system was wasteful and haphazard, but when a new and enterprising firm, Klaw & Erlanger, quietly arranged to represent practically all the first-class play-

houses and to book tours in an orderly manner, there was the usual cry of "monopoly." Undoubtedly, as it grew stronger, "The Theatrical Trust" did a little squeezing and some freezing out, as is common with combinations of this sort, but as is equally common, the increase in efficiency and dependability was enormous. Mr. Fiske, who was his wife's manager, was among those who didn't get the bookings or terms they demanded, and our *Dramatic Mirror* became St. George fighting the Dragon—or rather, in the word then used to describe trusts, the Octopus. This foolish and futile struggle we young fellows regarded as a holy war. We interviewed celebrities in our own and other walks of life, many of the latter therefore uninformed as to whether companies were "booked" or merely alighted where the spirit moved them. All expressed vigorous opinions, nevertheless, as is the wont of celebrities, and the interviews were more interesting and profitable—to us, at least—than those of preceding Mondays in Longacre Square. They brought me into contact with William Dean Howells, editor, essayist and poet, who had won wider recognition through his novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, and with Thomas A. Edison and Augustin Daly.

In 1897 Howells was called the Dean of American Letters. He seemed to me a courtly and amiable, though slightly puffy old gentleman of sixty or thereabouts, and he must have been kindly, also, to devote so much time to an eager and ambitious youth of seventeen. Gravely, we discussed literature, and Howells told me a story about a young author in San Francisco whose colleagues on a newspaper had introduced him to a prostitute without giving him and without his gaining the faintest notion of her profession. Norris had fallen in love with the woman, and written his first verses in an effort to gain favors that might have been purchased more cheaply. He sent her flowers and tender missives, until the girl, conscience-stricken and fearful of his learning the truth, left town. I had never heard of Frank Norris. Two or three years later Howells was to attract attention to Norris' fine tale, *McTeague*, and, shortly after that, my maiden effort of any importance was to be the dramatization of his more popular novel, *The Pit*.

Edison was pleasant but preoccupied, and not very helpful to

our cause. "The quickest way to dispose of a competitor," he said, "is to do what he does better than he does it. Few big combinations could exist unless they gave service superior to that of the little fellows. There's nothing to prevent the little fellows combining, is there? Much of this sort of protest comes from men who have been slipshod and inefficient, and want laws to protect and perpetuate that inefficiency." As the reader will have seen I was in complete agreement, but very little of that interview appeared in the *Mirror*. On Edison's wall hung or was inscribed a sentence declaring, in effect, "It is remarkable to what lengths people will go to avoid thought," and as he dismissed me the sage made a final observation I have never forgotten. I had ventured some callow comment on the wonders around us, and Edison answered, "Sometimes I think we inventors have gone too far. It might be well if we waited for the human spirit to catch up." Subsequent events have given those words the virtue of prophecy.

There was prophecy, too, in a rejoinder I drew from Augustin Daly, who was the most famous impresario of his time and managed theaters in London and New York. I had read somewhere that both playhouses were decorated in red and gold. "Those are carnival colors," Daly said, "and people must think of the theater as a carnival place. When they cease doing that, we shall have no theater."

These contacts were the high spots of what otherwise might have been a dreary stay in New York. Howells and Daly and Edison were the first national figures I had met, and even a bumptious youngster could understand instantly why they were national figures. Success, I noted then and believe now, is almost never an accident. If it were as easily won as I expected it to be, and as many of us think it is, our society would be like that navy in Salvador—all officers and no crew. Two accidents—if you choose to regard them as such—put the brakes on my career as a dramatist, and briefly threatened my connection with the *Mirror*. In spare time I had written a short play, called *The Honor of a Spy*, for an actor named Henry Bagge, who got a week's booking at the Union Square. Hotly pursued, the spy concealed himself in a closet, whence he emerged to defend a woman's reputation. The closet was what is known as "an interior backing," or, in plain English, a sort of screen. When the door closed behind him, the actor walked out of the

screen and into his dressing room, where he remained until time for his reappearance. At our first and only performance, however, Bagge had overestimated the interval, and slipped out of the theater for a drink which, under the strain of an opening, I suppose he needed. At any rate, when Edyth Totten was accused he failed to come to her aid. In despair both for reputation and final curtain, Miss Totten opened the door, disclosing a cupboard as bare as Mother Hubbard's. I had been a professional dramatist for twenty minutes, and waited several years for my next opportunity.

This experience should have warned me of the dangers of the Demon Rum, but apparently it didn't. The *Mirror's* staff covered new plays, and wrote criticisms, as we had done for the *Post*. Mrs. Fiske was to give her first performance of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in the Fifth Avenue Theater, still standing at Twenty-eighth Street and Broadway. The event was epochal to the boys on her husband's journal, and each of us prayed secretly to be assigned to the opening. For some reason, probably not connected with celestial favor, I got the job. Unfortunately it was a bitter cold night, and regarding my red-lined overcoat as inappropriate I had left it at home. A friend with whom I had dined at my own expense suggested a drink at his. A swallow of whisky each should warm both of us. It did, but insufficiently. At the old Hofbrau Haus in Thirty-third Street, for purely caloric purposes I had another drink and, still shivering, a third in the Gilsey Hotel. The two for which I paid cost twenty cents; never before had I had so many in one evening, but they were cheaper than a proper overcoat and seemed as effective.

I'm afraid they were more so. I was comfortably warm when I entered the theater, which also was more so. Forty-five years afterward, I'm still uncertain whether the subsequent jingling was of bells attached to the motive power of horsecars in Twenty-eighth Street, or only a ringing in my ears, but I do know all was silence when an usher awakened me just before midnight. The performance was over, and I hadn't witnessed a moment of it. I *had* read Hardy's novel, on which the play was founded, but what good would that do? I had seen and heard nothing of the magnificent job done by the boss's wife, and this amounted to treason and something criminally the reverse of espionage. Of course, Mrs. Fiske had been

magnificent—she always was in the *Mirror*, and, indeed, everywhere. Well, I thought, shivering equally from cold and apprehension as I hurried toward waiting presses, after all, one could say she was magnificent, superb, overwhelming. I said it, and more, and a lifetime later when Mr. Fiske introduced me as one of the speakers at a dinner in honor of Mrs. Fiske, he referred to my “youthful but masterly criticism of ‘Tess.’” It was then that the Fiskes first learned of the shocking dissipation and deceit of their unworthy minion.

You don’t have to be much of a mathematician to discover that my \$15 a week, minus \$5.00 for my family and \$7.50 for board and lodging, left little to “sun my soul, and grow.” The books I read in quantities were borrowed from a public library, but being a critic occasionally didn’t satisfy my hunger for theater-going. I had paid twenty-five cents each for gallery seats at the Knickerbocker, where Maurice Barrymore was presenting a bad melodrama of Sardou’s, and at the Casino, where Lillian Russell was to be seen in *An American Beauty*, but that kind of extravagance reduced my budget alarmingly. Around me, in plays still unwitnessed, were E. S. Willard, Nat Goodwin, Charles Coghlan and Richard Mansfield, who had just announced a new piece by a new dramatist, George Bernard Shaw. I wrote Paul Wilstach offering to supply gratis a weekly account of entertainment on Broadway, and winning his consent, invested in my second printed card, which described me as “Dramatic Correspondent of The Washington Times.” I was less dramatic than comic, perhaps, but that card gained me admission to most of the plays in New York.

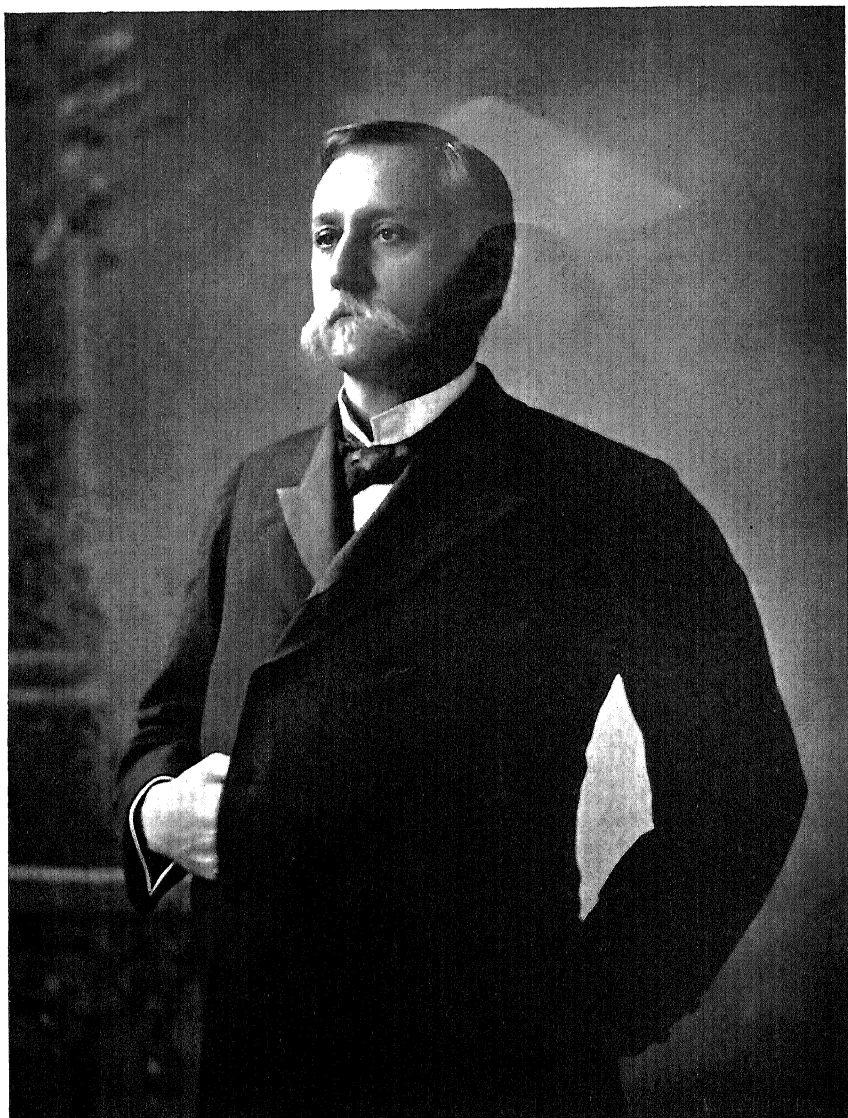
Eventually it gained me more. In January 1898, Paul Wilstach accepted the post of press agent for Richard Mansfield, whose biographer he became subsequently, and nominated me to succeed him on the *Times*. My salary was to remain \$15, but what of that? Fame was beckoning just around the corner, and who cared for Fortune? One question remained: On the *Post*, critical opinion of a play had depended largely upon the advertising bought by its management, and this I believed to be unwise and dishonest. The unwisdom and dishonesty of giving the weight of the printing press to the helpful or damaging judgment of an ignorant lad hadn’t occurred to me; I still shared the general view that dishonesty has to do only with



"EARNESTLY CHANNING POLLOCK"

The signature is indicative of a young man who took himself very seriously at 18.





SENATOR WILLIAM N. ROACH

"My step-father was a handsome and delightful person; a good husband, if not  
'a good provider.'"

money and immorality only with sex. Therefore, brashly, I informed Wilstach that I could accept the position but on condition that I wrote nothing except what I believed to be true. Paul replied that he had always done so. Accordingly, loaded with ambition and freshly printed cards, I returned in triumph to Washington, my family, and the Garfield Apartments.

Soon afterward I gave my mother away in marriage to Senator William N. Roach of North Dakota. Mother had been a widow five years, and was lonely. The Senator had called frequently before I went to New York, and all of us were fond of him. He was a Catholic who had been graduated from Georgetown University, had got into some kind of trouble while clerking for a bank in Washington, gone west to drive a stagecoach in North Dakota, and returned to represent that constituency. My stepfather was a handsome and delightful person, a good husband; and if I can't add "a good provider," that wasn't his fault. I never recovered the awed respect for Congress I lost when we married into it. Senator Roach had been deeply silent at the Capitol; now, at nineteen, I wrote one or two speeches he delivered with considerable success. Certain of my views on wheat, I believe, were widely approved—as they should have been, since I got them from the best authorities. When the Senator failed of re-election, nevertheless, he walked the town looking for work that he never found. I used to slip street-railway tickets into his clothing as it hung in the closet, and it was characteristic of the man that he never suspected the source of this endless supply. "I was about to stroll over to the State Department," he would say, "when I happened to feel in my waistcoat, and there was a quarter's worth of streetcar tickets. Funny; I can't recall buying them." The Senator died in 1902. He gave my mother the happiest years of her life, because he was the only man in her life who ever had time enough for that occupation.

As Dramatic Editor of the *Washington Times*, my own leisure was limited by the obligation to write thirty columns of criticism and comment every week. Thirty columns came to about 40,000 words, or at least half the number in an average novel. To be honest, a large part of this obligation was self-imposed. We published two editions, the *Morning Times* and the *Evening Times*, and reviews written for one had to be written again for the other. That

should have satisfied almost anybody, but I was a glutton for punishment. I rewrote a good deal of what came from my assistants, and every word of publicity sent by the theaters. If there was anything much I didn't write, the dereliction is not disclosed by those ancient scrapbooks. When a job might have been fairly easy, I invented a harder way of doing it. To the *Post* I had contributed two interviews every Sunday; now I reduced each interview to one cogent sentence, headed the column "Tiny Talks," and gave myself the task of calling on ten or twelve visiting authors and actors, instead of a couple.

My reward was that many of these "Tiny Talks" were quoted throughout the country. Charles Hoyt, already described as our most successful author of farce, announced the first performance anywhere of his latest work, *A Dog in the Manger*. As Hoyt was his own manager and director, no one else paid much attention to rehearsals, and consternation was national when, on the first night, it became evident that the play had been written by a man far from being in his right mind. The first curtain fell on a scene in which, to frighten a woman out of hiccups, the principal comedian dropped to his knees and pretended to be a dog, and newspaper men who spent the intermission in the office of the Lafayette Square Theater found Hoyt's partner, Frank McKee, telegraphing to cancel future bookings. Next day the author became a brooding invalid, and died shortly after. William De Vere, who was in the cast, said to me, "The man who has made the whole world laugh is now the saddest person in it." Of course, I printed that as a "Tiny Talk," and it was copied in hundreds of newspapers.

Many celebrated plays opened in Washington. For reasons to be revealed later the most memorable for me was Barrie's *The Little Minister*, which, with Maude Adams as star, was disclosed at the Lafayette Square on September 13, 1898. At its first performance the play was drowned in Scotch, and seemed a complete failure. The company had been taught an accent thicker than Newfoundland fog and less intelligible than Choctaw. This was soon remedied, and the piece became historic. Hall Caine's *The Christian* had its premiere at the National. Its author, I thought, had carefully cultivated a resemblance to the first Christian, but was disappointing nevertheless. Mrs. Leslie Carter, a society woman who came under the aegis of David Belasco and won fame by apparently swinging

from a bell so that "curfew shall not ring tonight" in *The Heart of Maryland*, achieved her greatest success in Washington. The play was Belasco's own version of the chromolike French *Zaza*, and I thought the redheaded star "as outstanding as a lighthouse, but less subtle." By the following summer I had accepted the popular edict, and referred to Mrs. Carter as "one of our best actresses." She was never that, but she remained one of the most profitable until a sudden marriage alienated Belasco, after which she dropped out of sight.

Israel Zangwill came to our city to launch his dramatization of *Children of the Ghetto*, and my interview with him was broadcast by the Associated Press. Dreyfus had just been convicted, and Zangwill told me he agreed with Max Nordau that "Europe is dotted with secret alliances of Jesuits." The talk of boycotting France he thought ridiculous. "How can you boycott a whole nation? Jews never have taken a stand of that sort, and never will. . . . The Royalists will bring about an upheaval in France. There will be another monarchy in Europe, and the decaying nation will have begun the downward career already consummated by Spain." Zangwill referred to the theater as "an art conducted as a business by bad businessmen," which is as much truth as was ever packed into a single sentence.

In spite of some fine writing and fine acting, *Children of the Ghetto* was a costly failure. One of the company was that skillful comedian William Norris, who played the down-at-heels Melchisedek Pinchas. While we were strolling along Pennsylvania Avenue the day of the opening, Norris stopped an elderly Jew and purchased the shapeless clothing he wore—"perfect for Pinchas." As agreed, the suit was delivered just before curtain time, but Norris didn't wear it; the honest old fellow had cleaned and pressed the garments until they would have gone unnoticed at a directors' meeting.

The star of *Children of the Ghetto* was Wilton Lackaye, "a Washington boy," and without honor in his own country. His family pronounced the name "Lacky," but after his resounding success as Svengali in *Trilby*, the son called himself "Lackeye." Washington accused him of swelled head. It was told of him that when he registered at the fashionable Arlington Hotel "Wilton Lackaye and valet," the next comer wrote underneath, "John Smith

and valise." The actor himself was a famous wit; *Children of the Ghetto* failed in London also, the company came back immediately, and Lackaye called this an excellent example of "small profits, quick returns." Six years later, Will starred in my dramatization of *The Pit*, and we began a friendship that lasted to the end of his life. Lackaye always insisted that we were of about the same age, and speaking at a dinner given me by the Friars' Club when I was forty and he had turned fifty-eight, he declared my hair was "prematurely black."

To each of the new plays I devoted a couple of columns, written in the two hours between curtain fall and going to press, and then rewritten for the evening edition. Long, close-packed, more or less scholarly reviews were the order of the day; William Winter frequently contributed 5,000 words or more to the *New York Tribune*. To me, criticism was a rite undertaken, if not after fasting and prayer, at least after much reading and thought. Later I was to spend a whole summer in preparation for a single review. Meanwhile even these stints, and as much as a page and a half of feature articles on Sundays, failed to consume all my energies or to supply all my needs. My salary continued to be \$15, and I had become the chief support of my family. I still wrote short stories that made round trips to editors. At \$3.00 a column, Alan Albert and I provided special articles for other sections of our journal, and once I carried a typewriter to the Library of Congress and copied sixty pages of the decision in a patent case for which a Baltimore lawyer paid me five cents a page. My final reward was far greater, however; it was between pages that I found and read the life of St. Francis that inspired *The Fool*.

Occasionally I earned an extra \$10 by writing publicity for soap and visiting attractions that lacked a press agent. My first venture was to advertise a lecture by James Whitcomb Riley. The poet called at my office and his conversation seemed to me unpoetic and humorous. Struck dumb by the rumor of such wealth, I asked Riley, "Is it true that you are paid at a dollar a word?"

"Yes," he answered, "but think of the days I can't write a gosh-damned word!"

After I had reported Riley's lecture he wrote me, "Congratulations; you got one sentence almost right." Generations of news-

paper men then unborn owe to that letter the fact that when I began lecturing, I always carried with me a fairly complete outline of my talk. Harry Kellar, the magician, sent me less ironic congratulations on an interview, together with a check for \$25 that for ethical reasons I never cashed. When I met Kellar again, a quarter of a century later, at dinner with the comedian Jefferson de Angelis, he called across the table, "What did you ever do with that check?"

Most of the gang on the *Times* worked as hard as I did, but I never heard any complaint. We wanted more money, of course, but felt certain of earning it some day, and meanwhile we were being trained and having a lot of fun. It never occurred to us that we were wage slaves, or any other kind—unless it be slavery to work for the joy of it. A darned good reporter named J. Syme Hastings discovered somewhere "a hitherto unpublished poem by Rudyard Kipling," and we promptly founded a magazine to publish it. The magazine was called the *Sphinx*, and when the first number appeared with this announcement on the cover we learned that the "unpublished poem," "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep," was included in the author's collected works, and we faced legal action. Our united resources of money and wee sma' hours had gone into that enterprise, which suspended immediately, but what did we care? We who were looking for new worlds to conquer!

There were a lot of darned good newspaper men in and near Washington. Our own staff included Garett Garrett, who became a noted economist, and Don Marquis was a cub on another paper. My own assistant—at the same salary I had received as assistant to Holcomb—was Harry A. March, who was studying medicine and became a successful physician in New York. March was my friend through life, and doctored Don Marquis to the end of *his* life. Henry Mencken was a cub, too, on the *Baltimore Sun*, and when I went to that metropolis for an occasional premiere we divided our time together between recitals of classical music and rounds of resorts in the red-light district.\* These neighborhoods were popular with most of us; less because "sex reared its ugly head"

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\*When I submitted this sentence to Mencken, he replied: "I not only authorize you to print that passage; I insist upon it. I am only sorry that you did not mention the fact that I was one of the most eminent piano players of that era—in fact, I had only one real rival in the whole United States, and that was Nick Longworth. He was the doyen of all the Cincinnati professors. We used to compare notes in his later years."

than because they provided the only beer and companionship to be had at two or three in the morning—a slack time in both professions.

Until that hour our dissipations were confined to coffee brought from a near-by restaurant in mugs that, to the great annoyance of the proprietor, we retained for use as pastepots. We had warm fellowship, great pride in our newspaper, and a truly romantic view of our calling. When our youngest cub—a lad named Ferguson—was shot in the fleshy part of his thigh while reporting a race-riot across the river in Alexandria, he bandaged the wound with a handkerchief and finished writing his story before telling anyone what had happened.

At times we may have been profligate, but it is needless to say none of us was a spendthrift. Don Marquis used to lower a tin pail with a quarter in it, from his window to a colored youth who kept a dime and invested the remainder in beer which, when the pail was drawn up again, we shared among us. Fifteen cents bought a lot of beer in those days, and usually Don's guests were only March and myself. With Don, Harry and I discussed our burning desire to own evening clothes. Neither of us had the required \$55, and Don suggested that as Harry was only an inch or two taller and broader than I, an outfit slightly too large for me and too small for him might serve both. We ordered the garments under agreement that they were to be March's on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and mine on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Of course the clothes arrived Friday. Harry wore them to take a girl to a ball at the Chevy Chase Club, and strolling about between dances, walked into an open well, ruining my half of the suit as well as his own. When they fished Harry out, our longed-for habiliments of fashion were a total loss, and I paid \$27.50 for my share of a dress suit I never saw. Many years later Don wrote this story, and sold it for exactly twenty times our original investment.

On February 16, 1898, I was awakened by a street full of newsboys crying extras; the *Maine* had been blown up at Havana. The national resentment of outrage that smouldered so long, and was fanned so sedulously, to involve us in two subsequent world conflicts, flamed instantaneously from the more dubious fuel. The powder train of sympathy with Cuba had been laid, and the explo-

sion aboard our battleship ignited it. Everybody said "Remember the *Maine*," though precisely what they were to remember nobody knew, or knows now, since the cause of the disaster has never been determined. War with Spain was declared on April 25, and five days later we were hysterical over Dewey's victory at Manila.

It is hard to realize now the extent to which this mild, white-mustached naval officer became an object of national worship. Like General MacArthur, he appealed to popular imagination, and from Manila 1898 to Manila 1942 no one ever occupied the place in our hearts that was held briefly by Admiral George Dewey. We had fought only thirty-four years before, of course, but that had been on our own ground; conquest in foreign waters, and of the forces of a foreign power, was a new idea. Moreover, many of the details were romantic. Dewey had cut the cables to shut off orders from Washington, sailed into Manila harbor holding his fire until after breakfast, and had then destroyed the Spanish squadron without the loss of a single American. John Kendrick Bangs, a favorite author of light verse, who afterward became my friend, wrote some lines in which the Admiral was quoted as remarking, "Damn the fish cakes; go ahead," and that ended with, "The grammar's bad, but, Oh, my son, I wish I'd did what Dewey done," and there probably wasn't a man, woman or child in the country who didn't repeat them. A grateful nation gave the Admiral a house, and, when Dewey gave it to his wife, turned on him furiously, and then forgot all about him.

Meanwhile, things weren't going so well with our troops on the island that had caused all the trouble. As always, we had been ill prepared; we have never entered a war any other way, and no costly and humiliating experience has ever taught us anything. Our men in Cuba were badly cared for, and there was a public scandal about "embalmed beef." Colonel Theodore Roosevelt took his first step toward the White House by organizing his Rough Riders and leading them, but like so many of our leaders he seems to have been rather an amateur soldier. Richard Harding Davis, novelist and picturesque war correspondent, sent depressing reports from Santiago. The Spanish sent to Santiago a fleet that, unlike the one at Manila, included comparatively modern and first-class ships. We had seen the *Valencia* off New York just before hostilities,



when her commander pointed her guns and told visitors what he could do to our skyscrapers. We began to believe him, and until his fleet was located panic spread up and down our coast. Congressmen who had voted against every naval bill suddenly wanted the mightiest battleships afloat, and wanted them right in their own front yards.

Courage was at low ebb on the evening of July 3, with our army stalemated outside Santiago and our navy waiting outside the harbor. The Spanish ships were inside, but there was no certainty they would stay in. Hobson had sunk the collier *Merrimac* at the entrance, vainly hoping to bottle up the enemy; thus following Dewey as a national idol, and into ridicule and oblivion when some girls kissed him at a celebration. At dinner on the third, Major West, military expert for the *Times*, told me things looked bad for us, and, very downhearted, I went to our local Coney Island, a summer park called Glen Echo, to review a new vaudeville show. It included two comedians of whom I didn't think much, and who became the most popular musical comedy team of their time—Dave Montgomery and Fred Stone.

When I returned to the office, just before midnight, pandemonium had broken loose. The good news was still arriving, though most of it came in a single thunderclap. The Spanish fleet had ventured out of the harbor and been completely destroyed by our squadron. Whether the credit belonged to Rear Admiral Sampson or to Rear Admiral Schley was to become a subject of bitter discussion, but that night nobody cared. Providentially, tomorrow was the Fourth of July, and material for celebration was available everywhere. Someone handed me a giant firecracker, and sharing the general madness, I stuck its rear end in the slot of a postbox, and lighted the fuse. Of course I expected a harmless explosion in the open air; instead, that infernal cylinder swung over to its side and dropped into the box. None of us waited to learn what happened next; probably nothing serious, as the box was intact next morning, and we never heard of the matter again, but for twenty years afterward I never saw a policeman without recalling that mailbox, and resisting an impulse to take to my heels.

## THE GLORY THAT WAS GREASE PAINT

EVERY age we look back upon was a golden age, but poring over the proudly kept scrapbooks of my work for the *Washington Times*, it is hard to understand how even the most satisfied modernist can deny that the end of the last century was a period of great glory—if not the period of greatest glory—in the theater.

How large a part the stage played in the life of that era is indicated by my statement that there were nearly five thousand theaters in America—"legitimate" theaters, for drama on the hoof; we had no illegitimate theaters then, and no drama in cans. There were 173 producing managers and 38 production houses on Manhattan Island. Chicago patronized 21 theaters, Philadelphia 15, Washington 7, Baltimore 6, Pittsburgh 4, and so on. The railways employed 552 agents to handle the business of 264 traveling companies, and towns the size of Bridgeton, New Jersey, or Peoria, Illinois, entertained, and were entertained by no fewer than five troupes a week. The seating capacity of our theaters totaled over five million. Thirty-six years later, the number of playhouses had dwindled to 122, and only 2 per cent of the 415 million dollars spent annually for theater tickets went to flesh-and-blood "shows." An art two thousand years in the making had all but disappeared within a quarter of a century.

Motion pictures killed the theater, we assert now, as in earlier times we found that murder being done by successive vogues of rollerskating, bicycling, bridge, golf and what-not. The truth is that there was no murder; the theater committed suicide. I repeat, Zangwill was right when he spoke of "an art conducted

as a business by bad businessmen." Augustin Daly was equally right in declaring that when the theater ceased being a carnival place "we shall have no theater." In Salt Lake an orchestra seat, except for extraordinary attractions, had cost \$1.00; in Washington the price rose to \$1.50 and then \$2.00. Eggs and beefsteak had gone up, too, but people must eat, and they are under no such compulsion to pay large sums for two hours of entertainment. Especially when another kind comes along at a fraction of the cost. Later, in New York, orchestra seats reached a minimum of \$3.00, plus 10 per cent government tax, and a man could marry the girl at only slighter financial risk than was involved in taking her to the play. For this and many other handicaps the unions were partly responsible, but they cannot be blamed for the sort of swindle that alienated numbers of customers at the turn of the century. This was the practice of sending out second, third and fourth companies, without scruple that they were also second, third or fourth grade. Subsequently, real-estate speculation extended this short-changing. In the 1920's, there were 73 playhouses on and off Broadway. Seventy-three playhouses require about 300 new plays a year, and 300 good plays aren't written in a year—or in ten years.

Physically and otherwise, Daly's "carnival" was completely taken over by the movies. In most towns the "opera house" had been allowed to become glum and shabby; the cinema palace was the butcher boy's dream of grandeur—and a place of life and light and luxury to many of us who weren't butcher boys. Some time after I returned to New York union musicians were pulled out of the theaters, and stayed out. After that, you paid \$3.30 to face an orchestra pit covered with autumn leaves and suggesting a dreary afternoon in a country churchyard, while for a sixth of that sum, you could sit in marble halls and with other diversions, enjoy the performance of a creditable symphony orchestra. The "legitimate" plays became as drab and depressing as their environment. We went in for "realism" in a big way, and "realism" meant whatever was ugliest and most sordid and uninspiring in life and human nature. The most acclaimed dramatists were those whose heroes belonged in Matteawan and whose heroines belonged in a Florence Crittenden Home. I shall never forget taking Ethelyn De Foe,

widow of the critic of the New York *World*, to witness a masterpiece the scene of which was laid on a farm. At the end of the first act, Ethelyn said, "Well, I hope the *cows* were normal." There was another masterpiece at the moment that became town talk. Everyone asked, "Isn't it wu-u-nderful?" When you inquired, "What is it about?" the enthusiasts were dumb. Later the leading man told me that neither he nor the rest of the cast had ever known. "We used to hold meetings to discuss it," he confided, "and once we thought we had solved the mystery. Then the author called us on the stage to explain what he termed his story, and after that we dropped the whole matter as beyond our intelligence." A noted critic said you had to understand this play with your soul; most critics agree the trouble with me is that I haven't that kind of a soul. Comparatively few of us have, and that's one reason for the decline of the theater.

You probably didn't buy or borrow this book to read an essay on drama, and I shall try to restrain myself in comparing the plays of then with those of now. It is the current fashion to dismiss as contemptible everything done before the First World War, and this seems to me insolence born of ignorance. If we should discount retrospective gilding of lilies, then, equally, we must discount the oracles who never saw a lily. A man may have read every botanical work ever published, but if he has never laid eyes on a flower, I for one shall not expect him to be fervent about blossoms. When a critic begins by admitting that he "failed to experience Maude Adams in *A Kiss for Cinderella*, or in anything else," and then, having experienced Barrie's cobweb comedy in the hands of an unskilled movie actress, blames its former popularity on "the naïvete of audiences of that day," my own comment is "nerfs!"

In 1898—and one of my favorite phrases—most of our critics weren't even a gleam in their mothers' eyes. Of what use is it to tell them of the magic wrought by Maude Adams and Ada Rehan and Ellen Terry? To paraphrase Bacon, these names are now but tinkling symbols. No glow can be kindled in bare minds by the statement that during my two years on the *Times*, beside the trio mentioned above Washington saw Henry Irving, Sarah Bernhardt, Tomasso Salvini, John Hare, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, Mesdames Mod-

jeska and Janauschek, Lily Langtry, Joseph Jefferson, Charles Coghlan, James O'Neill, Nat Goodwin, Sol Smith Russell, Julia Marlowe, Maurice Barrymore, Richard Mansfield, E. H. Sothorn, W. H. Crane, Stuart Robson, Roland Reed, Henry Miller, William Gillette, E. S. Willard, E. M. and Joseph Holland, Viola Allen, John Drew, Otis Skinner, May Irwin and nearly as many more of comparable standing and ability. Am I merely nostalgic in suggesting that the idols of new arts, including Charlie McCarthy and Donald Duck, somehow indicate shrinkage?

Since I can laugh myself off my seat at Ed Wynn or Danny Kaye, I may escape the charge of bias or an atrophied sense of humor if I urge the betterness of musical comedy that in those seasons brought the Bostonians, with Henry Clay Barnabee and Jessie Bartlett Davis; Alice Nielsen, Lillian Russell, Anna Held, Charles Bigelow, Francis Wilson, Raymond Hitchcock, James T. Powers, Frank Daniels, De Wolf Hopper, Della Fox, Dan Daly, Jerome Sykes and Thomas Q. Seabrooke. All these were trained singers and comedians; long and arduous preparation was essential to success in any branch of the profession; the cinema had not yet made the cloakroom attendant of yesterday the star of today. Francis Wilson had had years of "legitimate" roles at the Chestnut Street Theater, Philadelphia, and De Wolf Hopper other years in the Madison Square Theater Company before both served long apprenticeships with the McCaull Opera Company. Even the clowns of that era—Weber and Fields, Ward and Vokes, McIntyre and Heath—had begun learning their trade in childhood. You can take it from one whose knowledge of the past has not prevented his enjoying the present that from McIntyre and Heath to Amos 'n' Andy—for example—is almost as far a cry as from the sure art of Sir Christopher Wren to the hit-or-miss method that produces log cabins.

The popular and even the professional view of today is that yesterday's actors were strutters and mouthers, and yesterday's plays unimportant, artificial and machine-made. This is sheer nonsense. The notion that today's actors discovered the virtues of repose and repression is of a piece with the theory that today's authors discovered sex. William Gillette displayed these virtues in *Held by the Enemy*, James A. Herne in *Shore Acres* and Edwin

Booth in *Hamlet* as conspicuously as any player of our own time. Frank Bacon's amiable drunkard in *Lightnin'*, 1918, varied little as to method from Joseph Jefferson's amiable drunkard in *Rip Van Winkle*, in which he had given hundreds of performances before I saw it in 1898. In the long list above I can find only three or four people who were what their contemporaries called "teapot actors." You could hear them, and make out what they were saying, even when you sat back of the sixth row, and most of them had experience in art and living that is uncommon among our pretty but empty dolls. I except a dozen stars, like Katherine Cornell—the best Juliet I ever saw—the Lunts and Helen Hayes, though even *she* came a fearful cropper with Shakespeare. Classic drama requires a certain "robustiousness"; you can no more play it without that than you could play the funeral march from *Götterdämmerung* on a flute!

The most contemptuous thing "we moderns" can say of a book or a play is that it is "demoded." Fashions change, of course; Greek dress isn't worn in this age, but does that keep it from being beautiful? Yesterday's book or play is "demoded" today, and today's will be tomorrow, but for that reason must art begin afresh every morning? In Temple University, I used Pinero's *Iris* as an example of sound dramatic structure. When one of the students said "demoded," I showed him how often the pattern had been employed by our youngest and most radical innovators. It is a fallacy that realism, study of human nature, and interest in the world's problems were first displayed in the theater about 1920. Are the problems of Eugene O'Neill or Maxwell Anderson more vital and representative, or more seriously and honestly considered, than those of *Ghosts* and *The Weavers* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*? As I write, our arbiters are pointing out that Gillette's *All the Comforts of Home*, just revived, was typically yesterday's stuff and nonsense. Well, so is today's *Arsenic and Old Lace*. We had, and have both kinds of entertainment—thank heaven! The chief differences between yesterday's better plays and today's are superficial matters of morals and manners—questions of the commonness of telephones and osculation, and of the hopelessness of being "a woman with a past." Of these latter, however, even in the period of Pinero, witty Max Beerbohm could write:

"Lovely lady, we implore,  
Go away and sin no more—  
Or, if that effort be too great,  
Go away at any rate!"\*

Dropping my subject before you drop my book, I venture to suggest that a vogue in art is established by the greatness of artists, and that if Victor Hugo began writing now, or Bernhardt began acting, it wouldn't be long before most of us were trying to write like Victor Hugo or act like Sarah Bernhardt.

Even manners and morals must be measured by the standards of their epoch. The first time any of us heard "God damn" said on the stage was in 1909, when Clyde Fitch's *The City* was revealed in New York. We were shocked, but no more so than we should have been by plain "damn" a decade before. Naughtiness and nudity in the theater and elsewhere startle us only in proportion to their departure from current custom. The "full tights" of which I have written, covering the beauties of the nineties from heels to neck, produced no smaller reaction than does our own night-club nakedness, because the departure from the common was as great. If our burlesque shows had been uncurbed, we might have lived to see the day when, accustomed to bare skin, we could be thrilled only by a chorus in sleeping-bags!

We were terribly upset by a wave of stage wickedness about 1898. Charles Frohman, our first international manager on a large scale, had been importing plays from Paris, and suddenly found the "spicy" ones most profitable. Looking back from present latitudes, it is amusing to recall what brought thunder from press and pulpit. Sadie Martinot in *The Turtle* appeared to be disrobing behind a screen, over which she tossed various garments, and our town threatened legal action. I interviewed a disappointed policeman who, going behind the scenes at the critical moment, had found Miss Martinot in her room, while a property man, with an armful of underwear, threw one picce after another onto the stage.

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\*In *The Grand Whiggery*, by Marjorie Villiers, this verse is set down as "doggerel" of the early part of the nineteenth century, when it dealt with Queen Caroline of England. Otherwise, I have heard it only as quoted here, and attributed, rightly or wrongly, to Beerbohm.

As popular protest increased, and with it the box-office receipts, there came a flood of French farces—*The Cuckoo*, *On and Off*, *Mlle Fifi*, *The Girl from Maxim's*. In reality, most of them varied but slightly the formula used at Daly's Theater in the early eighties. A good example is the Hennequin-Billmaud-Carré farce, *In Paradise*, of which I wrote: "The plot is deliberately unpleasant. . . . M. Pontbichot, a gentleman who has reached the age of indiscretion, brings his wife and daughter to Paris in search of a husband, secretly vowing that this son-in-law shall be able to initiate him into the mysteries of gay metropolitan life. Unfortunately—or the reverse—Raphael Delacroix, who loves this girl, suffers from a past that is utterly blameless. Anxious to please the father of his inamorata, he engages Claire Taupin, a neighbor, to pose as his—hem—sweet-heart." You can guess the rest, but that "hem" represents the approved method of being naughty in the nineties. You winked when you called a spade "a garden implement," and the wink did it. When Anna Held sang "Won't You Come and Play Wiz Me?" her lyric described a child who wanted company, but because Miss Held rolled her eyes she became an international symbol of impudicity, and the founder of fame and fortune for Florenz Ziegfeld.

Though our theater was even farther from orderly business methods than at present, it remained a realm of warm comradeship and romantic adventure. Its people were of a kind apart from all others. Edwin Booth deplored this, and establishing that most delightful of all clubs, The Players, in New York, provided that its membership should include a certain number of laymen. To say that actors were a distinct tribe, however, does not mean that they were less respectable than the rest of society. As a matter of fact they were rather more so. Most of them would have been horrified at the scandals and divorces in Hollywood, of which strange place William C. Fields, one of its shining lights, being asked recently about the alleged prevalence of delirium tremens, said, "How can you know you've got delirium tremens in Hollywood?" My wife's is one of the oldest theatrical families in America, if not the oldest. Her maiden Aunt Emma, who had toured with Booth and Barrett, loved to tell of nights when John Wilkes Booth was entertained at her mother's home in Chicago, and suppers after the performance were a forum for discussion of literature and drama. Aunt Emma



recalled the assassin of Lincoln as a gentle, learned and fascinating person; somewhat eccentric but the last man on earth of whom one could have expected that mad act. "Em" lifted an eyebrow frequently at modern goings-on, and kept a collection of clippings to prove that clergymen are in the police courts far more commonly than actors.

There were almost no theatrical unions—not even the Actors' Equity and the Dramatists' Guild of the Authors' League. The time was still to come when a manager would be penalized by the electricians for turning on a light in his own theater, or the musicians would classify John Barrymore's *Hamlet* as a musical comedy, and thereby add to their salaries. Lest I be accused of "looking backward through the glow of sunset," or wear the readily applied brand of being "anti-labor," I hasten to admit that abuses were many and flagrant. Responsible managers paid well and regularly, but there were enough of the other kind to give jocular meaning to the term "strolling players." J. Robert Rubin, an actor who became vice president of Metro-Goldwyn and one of the highest salaried executives in the country, told me a tragic tale of starting for home from Albany, and plodding all night, only to find at dawn that he had been moving *away* from New York, and had increased the intervening distance by twelve miles. A contemporary comedian made famous a song running:

"It's fourteen miles from Schenectady to Troy—  
You want to keep tabs on that, my boy—  
And when you get to Troy it's a damned long walk  
To the gay Rialto in New York."

Because of these conditions, perhaps, rather than in spite of them, our theater had a gallantry and an *esprit de corps* that have been lost. An instance is related by my old friend, R. L. Giffen, then impresario of an insolvent enterprise called *Miss Pocahontas*. Stranded in Peory—as another song had it—Larry borrowed a buggy, drove to the next town, achieved an advance from the manager there, and finally reached Milwaukee, only to be involved in one of the first of the theater's labor troubles. The union musicians were on strike, and Larry's director refused to conduct a non-union orchestra. Whereupon a chorus girl in *Miss Pocahontas*

declared that she could and would conduct, and did so with such satisfactory results that at the end of a profitable week she was presented with \$250. As recently as 1913 Mizzi Hajos, an adorable person and still a fine artist, pawned her own jewelry to get a musical comedy I had written out of Baltimore.

Criticism, which I practiced in Washington and as a side-line until my complete reform in 1919, was generally solid, scholarly, and very dull. In rebellion against William Winter and his apostles there came into being a new school, headed by Alan Dale. This new school was primarily personal; as someone said, "The capital *P*'s flashed past like telegraph poles seen from a rapidly moving railway train." Dale, whose real name was Cohen, made no pretense of erudition; he was far more concerned with himself than with the plays he reviewed, and with amusing his readers than with instructing them. As readers were beginning to prefer amusement to instruction, this school became the established one. Later the two merged; modern criticism is informative *and* amusing; the writer tells you a good deal about the play, while never permitting you to forget his individual bias, wisdom or importance. Among other results this stress gave increased circulation to Roget's *Thesaurus*; words known to most of us came to be considered trite; anybody could call an actor "an actor"—the clever thing was to call him a clown, or, better still, a scaramouch or a zany.

At least, I was conscious of my ignorance. When, knowing no more of music than of metaphysics, I was compelled to review six performances by the visiting Metropolitan Opera Company, I had the grace to spend previous weeks studying scores. I don't say that made me a competent critic; merely a little less harmfully incompetent. I have referred to a later review to readiness for which I devoted a summer—and, I might have added, my lifetime savings. It would be difficult to explain how, but, by that time, these had reached the impressive total of \$200.

Coquelin's appearance in Paris as Cyrano in Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* was an international sensation when the management announced that Richard Mansfield would give the tragedy its first American performance the following season in Washington. This was "boots and saddles" for me, and I determined to see Coquelin's *Cyrano*. One of my closest friends then and until his recent death

was Thomas E. Shea, an actor who had brought classic drama into popular-priced theaters and who afterward made a fortune with a thriller entitled *The Man o' War's Man*. Tom and I paid \$42.50 each for the best accommodations on the Dominion Liner, *Canada*, and with Mrs. Shea, who was pretty, we sailed from Boston in May 1899.

When we reached Paris, Coquelin, indisposed, had ended his season, but I spent five francs a day, then one dollar, for board and room at 7 Avenue du Trocadero, and two weeks witnessing a few plays and great many revues. At one of these I had my first visual evidence since infancy that the female of our species is a mammal, and was duly shocked and fluent. As stated, in Washington even the fact that woman is a biped was supposed to be a secret between the woman and God. My clearest recollection, nevertheless, is of a *café chantant*, a huge open-air variety theater that later was represented in David Belasco's production of *Zaza*, and in which now I first heard Yvette Guilbert. She was young then, at the height of her powers, and quite unforgettable. In French, and a curious nasal tone, she sang Eugene Field's "A little peach in an orchard grew" as though it had untold meanings, most of them very naughty indeed. She was tall, thin and white except for scarlet lips and hair, and she wore the famous black gloves to within an inch or two of her armpits. Shortly, I was to hear Albert Chevalier's inimitable Coster songs, Harry Lauder's Scotch humor and pathos, Marie Lloyd's Cockney wickedness, and to experience the fine art of Vesta Tilley, but none of them left the lasting impression of that lean, black-gloved figure in front of the gas lamps, and of the eloquent twang in which she etched verbal pictures. Much later I became acquainted with the same Guilbert as an international celebrity, specializing in decorous old French ballads, but something was gone then. It may have been her youth, and it may have been mine.

Chevalier appeared in a suit covered with pearl buttons, and drew tears with his:

"We've been married now for forty years,  
And it don't seem a day too much.  
There ain't a lady living in this land  
That I'd swop for my dear old Dutch."

Vesta Tilley dressed herself as a dapper young man, and her best song concerned the summer meeting of two pretended aristocrats. Later:

"In a restaurant he goes dashin',  
Who should bring his plate of hash in  
But the maiden he'd been mashin'  
By the sad sea waves."

This was a typical English music-hall lyric and a revelation to an American, whose own popular songs at the time chiefly rhymed "blue" and "true," and dealt with the dead mother "in the baggage coach ahead," or the precocious child who reassured her fellow passengers on a railway train in a blazing forest:

"Daddy's on the engine,  
Don't you ever fear;  
Everybody's safe because  
My dad's the engineer."

The logic seemed faulty, but nobody cared in an America that loved its ballads illustrated with highly colored lantern slides, and could accept as sentimental the statement that:

"She was my mother,  
I had no other."

Marie Lloyd was the idol of London; one of the stock stories was of a bus driver who, after miles of listening to the misinformation one tourist gave another, found the volunteer guide hesitating before a statue of Queen Victoria. "Cheer up, guv'ner," the busman prompted. "Tell 'er it's Marie Lloyd."

In London the Sheas and I lived in one of those Bloomsbury boardinghouses devoted to our countrymen. Food and lodging were thirty shillings a week, or about what they had cost in New York. As in New York the great difficulty threatened to be the price of theater tickets. This was solved by my card, still proclaiming me "Dramatic Correspondent of *The Washington Times*," and by a degree of managerial courtesy explainable only on the ground

that most London managers were also actors and gentlemen. When, a few years ago, as the author of more than thirty plays I sent my check to the New York Theater Guild with a request for assistance in obtaining good seats, and got back a curt note without check or seats, I was reminded of Sir John Hare (then plain John), who in his own hand wrote the \$15-a-week visiting dramatic editor that "there are no seats unsold for 'The Gay Lord Ques,' and I apologize for asking you to accept, with my compliments, the chairs I shall have placed in an aisle."

Before that, I had gone out of town to see Irving and Terry in *The Merchant of Venice*, and became another worshiper of the unequalled Ellen. I spent £2 for flowers that were sent her anonymously, and then, alarmed at the state of the exchequer, dined on sixpence. My worship of Ellen Terry, with my mute, inglorious idolatry of Maude Adams, became a spiritual bigamy so notorious that, when I married, seven years later, a wit declared that I had "committed trigonometry."

Shaw wrote that "every famous man of the last quarter of the nineteenth century had been in love" with Miss Terry, and before long, Miss Terry herself was to write, in her memoirs, that "Maude Adams is just worshiped in America, and has an extraordinary effect—an educational effect—upon all American girls." Reverting to that "sunset glow," perhaps, I must question the profit to American girls in shifting allegiance from Maude Adams to the movies. Recently in Pittsburgh I was interviewed for a high-school newspaper by a sweet young thing with plucked eyebrows and other emulations of the houris of Hollywood. When I asked whether she had ever heard of Maude Adams, the girl shook her head, and inquired: "Was she in pictures?" *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

Maude Adams was a moonbeam. Ellen Terry was a flame; no one could describe her, but the two best attempts may be Sargent's portrait in the Tate Gallery and Robertson's statement that "she shone with no shallow sparkle or glitter, but with a steady radiance that filled the room." Miss Adams' outstanding quality was a poignant gallantry. There is a pipe organ in Germany, one note of which will shatter glass; Maude Adams had tones that did exactly that to one's heart. I never met these two of the only three

women I ever loved. That may be as well. "I think I'd rather never meet you—in the flesh," Ellen Terry wrote Shaw, who answered, "Wise Ellen . . . who knows how to clothe herself in that most blessed of all things—unsatisfied desire."

Nevertheless, I was wrong in describing myself as a mute idolater. Following the flowers in England, I sent Miss Terry telegrams on most of her American first nights, to one of which she replied with a single line, "You are always kind." Miss Adams never replied to anything. After her opening in Rostand's *Chantecler*, I wired her four hundred words: "Tomorrow the critics will say . . . how much better Coquelin plays it. They haven't seen him. I have. The part demands chiefly what you chiefly have to give." The critics did say it, but if Miss Adams received my prophecy she never mentioned it. During all their long association, Daniel Frohman told me, she wrote not more than half a dozen letters to his brother Charles, who was widely and erroneously reported to be her husband. D. F. was amazed when he learned I had never met Miss Adams, and before his death repeatedly suggested bringing us together in his studio, but I replied that I was "too old to risk losing an illusion."

The last time I saw, or shall ever see Maude Adams, she was at her best—in *A Kiss for Cinderella*. I was among Ellen Terry's audience when she broke down and forgot her words in Boston, and again, in 1915 in what I believe was her final appearance, when she took off a string of amber beads, saying, "The weight of them is too much for me." S. P. B. Mais, the English novelist, once related to me a lovely story of how, when Miss Terry's memory failed her at a rehearsal for a revival of *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, and she began improvising, Shaw sat in the stalls drawing his fingers through his beard. Panic-stricken, the manager ran to him, asking, "What are we going to do?"

"Nothing," Shaw said. "Only keep quiet. She is speaking my lines as I should have written them."

There were so many great artists on the stage at the end of the nineteenth century that it is difficult to decide which were the greatest. Miss Terry was among these, of course, and so were Irving, and Coquelin, Réjane, Salvini, Sonnenthal, Lucien Guitry, and, perhaps, Madame Modjeska—in spite of her distracting Polish accent the best Lady Macbeth I ever saw. His much burlesqued

mannerisms notwithstanding, Irving's Shylock was heartbreaking; there was truth in Robertson's comment that the Judge would have released him, with a humble apology, long before they got to Portia. Bernhardt and Duse outshone all the rest. From among our own countrymen I should select Ada Rehan, Mrs. Fiske, Nat C. Goodwin and Joseph Jefferson. Even in his old age Jefferson had a twinkling eye. Not long before his death he told me that his son, William Winter Jefferson, had cabled him from Paris requesting a large sum. Joseph cabled back, "What for?" and the boy answered, "For Willie." In that same chat, Jefferson mentioned a clergyman who had condemned "buffoons." "What harm is there in merri-ment?" the actor asked. "When Shakespeare painted an arch-villain, was it the jolly Falstaff, or 'the lean and hungry Cassius'?" No man ever plotted evil while he was laughing." It was David Warfield who remarked subsequently, "Any onion can make people cry; show me a vegetable that can make them laugh."

Tom Shea and I met Nat Goodwin in London, where he was acting brilliantly in Clyde Fitch's *The Cowboy and the Lady*, having returned from a tour of Australia. Of that courageous continent, now so closely linked to our fortunes, Goodwin told us, "You travel 10,000 miles, and then you get to Newark." He would have found Sydney a different place today. Besides Goodwin, that season in England our stage was represented by William Gillette, De Wolf Hopper, and *The Belle of New York*, which was running on like Tennyson's brook. London was then the theatrical capital of the world—a distinction it won from Paris and lost to Moscow and subsequently, in sequence, to Berlin and New York. Our fortnight's visit was a rich experience. Pinero never wrote a better comedy than *The Gay Lord Quex*, in which Irene Vanbrugh made her first sensational success as the manicure girl, Sophy Fullgarney. We saw Charles Wyndham in R. C. Carton's *The Tyranny of Tears*—another brilliant comedy—and Cyril Maude in *The Manoeuvres of Jane*, by Henry Arthur Jones, and Dion Boucicault and Lena Ashwell in *Wheels Within Wheels*. Irving and Terry returned to the Lyceum with *Robespierre*, and of Sarah Bernhardt's Hamlet I wrote back to the *Times* that it was "monotonous, one-keyed, and ever-womanish." Tom and I attended the opening of Martin Harvey in Freeman Wills' dramatization of *A Tale of Two*

*Cities*, called *The Only Way*, and deciding that Tom would be a good Sydney Carton, I visited Wills, a clergyman, who defeated himself at billiards while explaining to me that Henry Miller had the play for America.

I got back to New York in July, so completely broke that I spent that afternoon trying to find someone who would ask me to dinner. The Sheas had remained in Boston, my few metropolitan friends all had dinner engagements, and I ended at the free-lunch counter in the saloon opposite the *Dramatic Mirror*. Regaining Washington, I devoted every spare hour to study of the actual *Cyrano*, born in 1620 in Périgord, and of Rostand's. I still have that text, lined and underlined and flanked with marginal notes. When Mansfield decided to open his season in Philadelphia, I saw the piece there, and again in Baltimore, and finding the production unperfected, merely sketched my review, to be filled in and expanded after the first night in Washington.

Richard was himself—a bizarre self—at a reception in his honor the preceding afternoon in the Columbia Theater. This house had been Metzger's Music Hall, and when Mansfield caught sight of an "M" that remained in a cornice, he beamed and remarked, "What a charming compliment!" He was an astonishing person—the more so as I saw him afterward through a long and close friendship with his widow, Beatrice Cameron. During his life Mansfield's histrionic reputation was curiously linked with a reputation for throwing loin chops at waiters. I suspected that these incidents came of an instinct for advertising, and it was interesting to learn later that, at home, the lion was a lamb.

As an actor I think he was over-rated. Mansfield had authority, intelligence, and a hard, brittle surface that shone in some kinds of comedy. Not even as Beau Brummel did he enlist my ready sympathies, and though I had sat moist-eyed through the German performance of *Old Heidelberg*, the American left me admiring but unmoved. In Shakespearian roles Mansfield was Mansfield, as Irving was Irving, but one felt that Shylock must really have been a Venetian Sir Henry, and had no such illusion in witnessing Mansfield's Merchant or Richard III. With apologies to my dear dead Beatrice, I suspect I was right when I wrote of his *Cyrano* that it was "A disappointment . . . Mr. Mansfield's forte is irony;



he lacks sentiment, and, at bottom, the role of Cyrano is a sentimental one."

Be that as it may, the Mansfield Cyrano was *the* theatrical event of that decade in America, and an outstanding social and cultural occasion in Washington. "Carriages drew up in long lines," I wrote in the *Times*, "and discharged their gaily dressed occupants; loaded streetcars paused to disembark those so unlucky as to be packed in them, and chattering, laughing, hastening pedestrians forced their way through the crowd and into the playhouse. The din of voices, the clattering of horses' hoofs, the brilliance of the jostling throng, and the glimmering of the arc lamps marked the event as an unusual one."

In preparation for this unusual event, as I have said, I had expended six months of my time, and my entire capital. After the premiere, I sat hours at my desk, rewriting a review that filled nearly three columns, extracts from which were given nationwide circulation by the Associated Press. Next morning Stilson Hutchins, who owned the *Times*, barked at me that the assassination of the Kaiser wouldn't have been worth that much space, and later in the day his son, Walter, editor-in-chief, sent me a letter that still hangs on my wall: "Nothing so comprehensive or so fine has ever, I think, appeared in a Washington newspaper. Ability so great developed at so early an age gives such promise for the future that I fear you will prove one of those blessings which brighten as they take their flight. Then would there be a local Cyrano, for I, also, have a fairly ugly nose, and it would be out of joint."

The following Saturday my salary was increased by a dollar a week. "My first step," I scribbled in my diary; "a fairly long step for a man not yet twenty." Pardon my immodesty if, at more than three times that age, I add, "And it was, too."

# The Times

OFFICE OF THE EDITOR.

WASHINGTON, 14 March 1899

Dear Mr. Pollock.

I wish to congratulate  
you upon and thank you  
for your marvellous Critique  
of "Cyrano de Bergerac" in  
this Morning's *Time*. Nothing  
so comprehensive or so fine  
has ever, I think, appeared  
in a Washington Newspaper.

Ability, so great,  
developed at so early an  
age gives such promise  
for the future that I fear  
you will prove one of those

## EDITORIAL PRAISE

after which the salary of the 19-year-old critic of *The Washington Times* was  
raised \$1 a week.

Flappings which brighten &  
they take their flights =

Then never there be  
a local Cyano = for

I, also, have a fairly  
ugly rose and it would  
be out of bounds.  
Most sincerely Yours

H. L. Hutchins

Mrs. Channing Pallock

## YOU NEVER KNOW YOUR LUCK

I HAVE written here, and in a magazine article, of the only three women I ever loved, but there seem to have been a good many others in Washington. All adolescents are subject to these attacks, but surveying my record as an incipient Lothario I wonder how I managed it. "Free love," of which we talked a lot in those days, is a contradiction of terms; few things require more time and money, and I had neither. At twenty I had never played an athletic game, nor seen one played; never danced, or gone swimming, or skated, or bicycled, or enjoyed any of the diversions common to youth. Even now I remain wholly ignorant of golf, football and baseball. When I told George M. Cohan a few years ago that I had yet to witness my first baseball game, he groped for words to express his disgust, and finally blurted, "Why, you're not an American!"

Nevertheless, I had "a soft spot in my heart" for the girls. My mother was authority for the statement that at the age of a week I tried to kiss my nurse, and nowadays I am always meeting sedate and white-haired ladies of whom I was enamored at school or a bit later. Few men, perhaps, have been blessed with as many good friends of the opposite sex, and I was fortunate in finding a wife who approved of and fostered these friendships. Besides the innocuous affairs already mentioned—one of them in deep earnest, however—I recall two rather violent passions in Washington. The first was kindled by an exotic damsel then very much in the news. Her name was Evangelina de Cisneros, and her imprisonment in Morro Castle had been among the minor irritations leading to our war with Spain. William Randolph Hearst had sent a reporter, Carl Decker, to effect her release, which, in first-page accounts, was a matter

of sliding down ropes and walking planks. Long afterward Carl told me that a small bribe had turned the trick rather more simply, but when the pair reached our shores they were popular heroes. Señorita de Cisneros was one of the most beautiful women on earth, and she reduced me to a state of non-alcoholic intoxication. Wherever we went, crowds gathered, and in Irvin Cobb's phrase, our romance had the privacy of a goldfish. Eventually Evangelina married somebody and disappeared. All the women I ever loved, excepting two, seem to have married somebody else—which, in view of the national prejudice against polygamy, is just as well.

My second adventure involved a lovely girl known as Katherine Mulkins, who visited our city with Willie Collier in *The Man from Mexico*. At the end of their week at the National Theater I decided that life without Katherine would be a total loss. Two days later I posted a proposal of marriage to her address in New York, and then, suddenly sobered, began wondering how I was to provide for a wife *and* my own family on a salary of \$15. I wired Miss Mulkins begging her to return my letter unopened, and receiving no reply, worried myself sick. Throughout a desperate fortnight of looking into shop windows and turning faint when I saw the prices of household furniture, it seems never to have occurred to me that the lady might say "no." I never heard more of my telegram, but the letter came back with rubber-stamped information that it had been misdirected. When Katherine finally learned of my proposal she had been many years married to a son of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Greater worries were in the making; there had been prophetic vision in Walter Hutchins' suggestion that I might "prove one of those blessings which brighten as they take their flight." From the beginning our local managers had not liked my candor with regard to their offerings, and their resentment increased with my influence on the receipts. This latter was due partly to the fact that previous newspaper criticism had been something more than charitable—a charity that began, not at home, but in the business office. It was due, also, to vigorous and sometimes vicious writing. I had acquired a second assistant, John Blackwood, at nothing a week, and John's greatest ambition was to equal the wit with which Eugene Field had described an actor who played Richard III: "He played the king as

though he was always expecting somebody else to play the ace." John was reasonably good at that kind of thing. "In kindness to the cast," he declared of an attraction at the Lafayette Square, "one should recall the sign above a pianist in a western dance hall: 'Don't shoot the professor; he's doing his best.'" The Lafayette's paid announcement was missing from our columns next morning, and throughout my remaining tenure of office.

John Blackwood and Harry March and I found ourselves in a war that, for us, dwarfed the recent unpleasantness with Spain. It spread to all fronts, and caught us in the rear. That particular action was undertaken by a player afterward engaged for my first comedy, *The Little Gray Lady*, and I was rather pleased than otherwise, since it produced the only adequate retort I ever achieved within a day or two of the proper time. Having floored me with a well-directed blow from behind, my assailant demanded, "What have you to say now?" and I answered, "Only that if you could act as well as you fight this would never have happened." I was less spontaneous when a vaudeville artiste brought a horsewhip to my sanctum because I had said her performance lacked refinement. The obvious comment on *that* didn't occur to me until a moment ago.

Slowly but surely we lost most of our advertising. Curiously, at the time, there were two provincial critics whose battle began to make a noise beyond its boundaries. The other was James Forbes, in Pittsburgh, whose career ran astonishingly parallel to my own. We went to New York the same month, became press agents the same year, and then dramatists—Jimmie with *The Chorus Lady* and I with *The Pit*. When, afterward, we compared the scrapbooks we kept in those days, Jimmie conceded that I had been more widely and feelingly abused. Anonymous letters dealt with my "billious vaporings," and a Washington weekly called *Afterthought* christened me Willie the Knocker. The New York *Dramatic News* declared editorially that "there is a little man with a big vanity connected with the Washington *Times*, and when the cool weather takes away the legal limitations, he shakes off his muzzle and begins to bark." Other newspapers came to the rescue. The veteran Montgomery Phister, in the Cincinnati *Commercial Tribune*, insisted that "Pollock is one of the ablest and most reliable writers on

dramatic affairs in this country," and the Indianapolis *Journal* stated, "The *Times* has suffered a curtailment of its amusement advertisements, but has gained vastly in public esteem."

In calm retrospect I conclude that both sides were right. I was "a little man with a big vanity," and few other qualifications for writing criticism. To be fair to myself, I was also, like the dance-hall pianist, doing my best, and doing it at an enormous expenditure of effort and energy. Moreover, I was scrupulously honest, as far as possible without bias, deeply in earnest, wholly indifferent to personal consequences—and very, very young. My sense of obligation to my readers verged on the comic. We were not permitted to review entertainments that did not advertise, and this seemed to me so unfair to "my public" that I founded a weekly of my own, the *Critic*; a kind of bulletin, printed on one side, and hung in hotels and other places of assembly. The sheet aroused such a storm of managerial protest that, for a while, I issued it under a nom de plume, and then suspended publication.

The end came in 1900, after David Belasco had brought to the Columbia Theater a farce entitled *Naughty Anthony*. It was a very bad farce—even Mr. Belasco, who wrote it, admitted that later—but a wiser crusader might have exercised more restraint in dealing with one of the few theaters left among our patrons. I noted "a total absence of wit or ingenuity," and prophesied failure in New York. Curiously, this prophecy may have had something to do with the creation of a minor masterpiece. Mr. Belasco, looking about for some means of bolstering up a weak attraction, bought from the Century Company the stage rights to a short story that he dramatized in two weeks. Used as a curtain-raiser, it won immediate success, and gave *Naughty Anthony* a short run at the Herald Square Theater. The story was John Luther Long's *Madame Butterfly*. Puccini saw the piece in London, and the result was an immortal opera.

The management, however, had no prevision of all this, and probably wouldn't have cared much anyway. The Columbia withdrew its advertising, and almost immediately Walter Hutchins told me I could have any other post I wanted on the *Times*, but that he couldn't afford to retain me as a critic. With conscious heroism

I declined Hutchins' offer, and stepped out. There is still a legend in Washington that I slipped into my last "Sunday page" an account of the sordid reasons for my dismissal, but the legend is unfounded. So, too, was my conviction that there would be a popular uprising in my behalf. My former employer, Harrison Grey Fiske, noted in the New York *Dramatic Mirror* that the Hutchinses "had more backbone than certain other proprietors and editors, but it appears there was a limit to their willingness to sacrifice revenue from advertising in the cause of honest journalism"—and that was that.

Nothing else on earth, perhaps, is as deflated as a critic or an editor out of a job. They have been stuffed with the sawdust of somebody else's paper and printers' ink, and when the sawdust runs out what is left in nine cases out of ten is a limp rag. Of the scores of important editors and critics I have known, with their tribes of flatterers and followers, not more than half a dozen have been heard of again after that sawdust was removed. Those, of course, were the men bigger than their jobs, the few who went on to greater success in other fields. This brief reflection somehow recalls a verse I was to write later for the program of my comedy, *Such a Little Queen*:

"How fraudulent is that high estate  
Which, like an opera glass, to all  
Can make the very small seem great,  
Or, turned about, the great seem small."

My own deflation was rendered especially painful by financial considerations. Through two years my salary had reached what I regarded as the princely sum of \$25, but even then \$1300 annually didn't do much more than provide for a family that included a famous critic, his younger brother and sister, their mother, and a statesman out of work. My stepfather was still looking industriously for the job he never found, and of my dear little mother's resources nothing was left but the gold-mining certificates and several lots that remained from my father's real-estate dealings in Salt Lake. These proved to be under water when the River Jordan was in flood, but mother never lost her faith that there was oil



beneath their surface, and at whatever personal sacrifice she continued to pay taxes on them. As none of her children shared her optimism they were abandoned at mother's death, and are still without oil pumps or a purchaser.

Heaven knows why I chose this particular moment to write a book. That, I suppose, represented my own dream of oil. It was summer, and hot as it can be only in Cambodia and the Sahara and Washington. There were no more jobs for former critics than for former statesmen. In New York, which again became my goal, the theatrical season was over, and as my faithful friend, Paul Wilstach, wrote me, "Opportunity, for the time being, is as extinct as the dodo." So, in a house where the Mayflower Hotel now stands, I sat at my typewriter and hammered out my first novel, a romance of the Passion Play at Oberammergau entitled *Behold the Man*. Before the work was finished my mother announced that, at luncheon, she had met a publisher who expressed eager interest in the book. That seemed to me very intelligent of him, and it was years after the volume's appearance that I discovered mother had met the expense. Where she found the money—a matter of \$300—heaven only knows, but certainly neither she nor I ever got any of it back. The opus promptly sank into oblivion, from which it rose recently with a kind of grim irony. While my most successful efforts were obtainable at a fraction of that sum, *Behold the Man* became a collector's item, and brought \$15 at an auction in Philadelphia.

One incident in connection with this work taught me a useful lesson. For research I had gone to the Congressional Library, where I encountered a familiar acquaintance, the venerable librarian, A. R. Spofford. "I want to read about the Passion Play at Oberammergau," I told him.

"*What* do you want to read about it?" he asked.

"Everything."

I waited an hour, and was thinking myself forgotten, when colored attendants appeared with five rubber-tired trucks loaded with books. Spofford had taken me at my word, and I was at the beginning of knowledge, which is to know how much there *is* to know. Later I learned that merely knowing doesn't make one a novelist, and that few novelists, including the good ones, earn much thereby. *Behold the Man* was accurately described as "a frigid

theatricality." Sixty or seventy copies were sold, which explains why the book is rare now. Last time I saw it was during a law suit, when an opposing attorney introduced a passage as evidence of my small ability and great irreverence.

At the end of my resources, in August 1900 I decided to go back to New York. The question "How?" was solved by my former assistant, Harry A. March. Harry owned a railway mileage book. It had to be signed if and when the conductor requested, so Harry and I sat up late one night while he taught me to forge his name. There are figures one never forgets—and I don't mean those in the *Follies*. I reached the metropolis with \$3.19, and paid \$1.50 in advance as a week's rent for a "top-floor center" at 34 West Thirty-eighth Street. In case you don't know, a "top-floor center" is a windowless room situated under the roof in the middle of a lodging house. There was a skylight that admitted the midsummer sun, but no air. I had stuffed the famous military overcoat into my bag to keep its other contents static, and an irreparable accident to my only trousers drove me to wearing it—in August! Almost immediately I broke out with prickly heat—which sounds comic, but wasn't.

Every morning I went job-hunting. My situation was desperate, and each rebuff heartbreaking. Frank McKee, who had been the partner of Charles Hoyt, gave me a card to the Shuberts, who had just come from Syracuse and set up for themselves in the Herald Square Theater, on the site now occupied by a corner of Macy's. A diminutive, dark-skinned youth took the card and told me Sam Shubert was too busy to see me. As I was about to protest, someone entered into conversation with the boy, who proved to *be* Sam Shubert. I got even later by becoming general press representative for the firm.

Journalism and the theater were the only trades I knew, and neither was awake to its opportunity. Presently I should be asked to pay another \$1.50 for rent, and I didn't have it. I had been wasting my substance in riotous living, spending as much as a quarter for dinner. Mending my ways, I invested fifteen cents in bread and cheese, which I ate twice a day in my room, afterward going to Eighth Avenue for coffee. The reason I walked those two long, hot blocks was that coffee was three cents on Eighth Avenue and five cents on Sixth.

Beggars cannot be choosers, and before the end of that week I was looking for work on the river front. There, early one morning before the docks of the Joy Steamship Company—"New York to Boston \$2"—I saw the sign: STEVEDORES WANTED. I'm not sure I knew what a stevedore was, but I soon found out. A stevedore is the motive power of a heavy-laden truck on its journey from the street to the bowels of a ship. On the Joy Line Dock—I speak from memory, of course—this distance began by being twenty miles, and became hundreds. Unaccustomed to such labor, my hands blistered, and the blisters broke. I bound them in my handkerchief to keep them from sticking to the truck. The other stevedores had more self-confidence; I worked in fear of being caught lagging, and so long that, when I finally called it a day, the paymaster's window was closed, and I walked home wageless.

My capital was five cents. On the way to Eighth Avenue for coffee, I passed a group of colored boys eating watermelon. Apparently they thought me funny, and they were right. With the accumulated resourcefulness of years, I wonder now why in blazes I didn't sew or pin a bit of cloth from that overcoat where it would do the most good, instead of wearing it. Lanky, long-haired, pallid and haggard, draped in a garment that would have been ludicrous in midwinter, I must have looked like a bad caricature of a ham actor. One of the colored boys threw a melon rind that struck me in the neck, but that wasn't where it hurt. Life reached an all-time low for me that evening in Thirty-eighth Street.

Next day, with sore hands and muscles, I was taking a two-bars rest on my truck when I was accosted by a bearded stranger who inquired, "What are you doing?" I said I was trucking, though, at the moment, that was obviously untrue. The stranger looked me over and continued, "You're no stevedore." He was plainly a person in authority, and I could see my job hanging in the balance. I *was* a stevedore, I insisted; the last of a long line of stevedores. "Come along," the stranger commanded; "I want to talk to you."

On the door of his office were the words F. M. DUNBAUGH, PRESIDENT. I told him my tale, and he made me assistant time-keeper. Afternoons I was to go uptown in further search of work for which I was better equipped. That same day, I met E. D. Price, who was general manager for Brady and Ziegfeld. Ziegfeld wanted

a newspaper man with Anna Held, Price said; he had an agent, Melville Stoltz, but Stoltz couldn't write. "*You can*," Ziegfeld admitted, "and if you can praise Miss Held half as eloquently as you've always damned her, you're the man I need." However, since I didn't know the ropes and must team up with Stoltz, I'd have to work cheap. "I'll give you \$50 a week," Ziegfeld concluded; "that's the best I can do." It was exactly double the best anyone else had ever done, and when I wired my mother that I had a job, I said "at thirty dollars" because I knew she wouldn't believe any of the story if I said "fifty."

Not long afterward my brother was employed by the Joy Line and became friendly with the president, who never told him of our meeting. I thought he had forgotten it, but in 1925, lunching with William Lyon Phelps in New Haven, when I began relating this incident Billy interrupted to say he had heard it before. "Dunbaugh is my brother-in-law," he added. The experience with Ziegfeld taught me that self-respect is not the only reward for honest writing. There were many managers in New York whose productions I had liked and commended, but the only manager willing to give me employment was the husband of a woman of whom I had been consistently, but sincerely critical. In forty years of authorship I have never suffered from stating my convictions as vigorously as possible, nor known anyone who gained by cowardice and compromise. The determination to stand by these convictions, such as they were, cost me my job in Washington, but if I hadn't stood by them I might still be earning \$25 a week.

At the Tremont Theater in Boston where I began celebrating Anna Held in *Papa's Wife*, I began also what was to be a long and intimate association with Ziegfeld. Then I saw him only as an awe-inspiring Simon Legree. Never before or since have I encountered such a machine gun of ideas. Flo employed a French secretary, named Jean de Germaine, who used to follow him about like a pet dog. Whenever Ziegfeld had an idea, he sent someone a telegram. The first I received inquired whether I possessed a Cahn's *Guide*. This was the established encyclopedia of the theater, giving names of managers and critics, and their requirements in billing and "press stuff," and no one connected with the business was

without one. I made the mistake of mailing that information; before the letter reached Flo, he had repeated the question in two additional wires. About nothing in particular, after I had written my second *Ziegfeld Follies*, Flo dispatched twenty-three radio messages after me in the course of one ocean voyage.

I had never known anyone as luxurious. Tall, lean, dark, beagle-eyed and long-nosed, Ziegfeld was a singularly attractive man, and most of the several women who loved him at various times did so with a good deal of ardor. He was always immaculately dressed, and he was the first person I ever saw barbered and manicured in his own hotel room. That was at the Touraine in Boston, where Ziegfeld and Miss Held occupied an elaborate suite. While a man shaved him, and a girl polished his nails, Germaine stood at his feet, taking telegrams, and I perched on a sofa, taking orders. Silent but smiling, Anna Held sat in an armchair and darned stockings. The theater's outstanding exponent of gay living was one of the most completely domestic women I have ever met. Her naughtiness was assumed with the greater part of her French accent; in private Anna Held's English was almost as pure as her soul.

She was a shrewd businesswoman, too, and forever trying to curtail Flo's extravagance. Alluding to her famous song, she once told me, "It is easier to make my eyes behave than my husband." She referred to his addiction to gambling; "passion" would be too strong a word—Flo had no passion for anything outside the theater. He played roulette as coldly and disinterestedly as he took huge losses in business. Somewhere in Europe, once Ziegfeld promised his wife to come home early, and didn't. At dawn she woke under a weight of twenty-franc gold pieces. Slipping into her room and finding her covered by a checkerboard quilt, Flo had gently laid a gold piece on each square, and crept away. It is hard to say why he did this, since he was utterly without sentiment. If he hadn't died before the movies showed *The Great Ziegfeld*, Flo would have laughed himself to death at seeing himself expiring with a white rose in his hand.

Six weeks after I went to work for Ziegfeld he telegraphed dismissing me for incompetence. Perhaps the most sincere compliment ever paid me was his annoyance whenever, in later years, I related this incident. "That isn't true," he would snap. "You were fired

because I didn't need two agents." By then I had gone far in this profession, and Flo couldn't bear being accused of the smallest lack of prescience. He offered me \$250 a week to take charge of publicity at Weber and Fields Music Hall, but I declined it because I was enjoying myself with the Shuberts. However, Ziegfeld probably was stating the fact when he said I was fired because he didn't need two agents. Every line I wrote had been scrapbooked, and when the scrapbook was complete Flo felt that Stoltz could get on without a literary assistant.

Crushed, I returned to New York, and this time to a luxurious boardinghouse in Twenty-first Street, where my food and lodging cost \$8.00 a week. I had gained wealth, but lost confidence. My brother joined me, and found work at Siegel-Cooper's Department Store. William A. Brady was still a partner of Ziegfeld's in the Manhattan Theater, which stood on the present site of Gimbel's, Broadway between Thirty-second and Thirty-third Streets, where six years later Brady was to produce one of my most successful plays. Price, who represented both Brady and Ziegfeld, probably knew the real reason for my dismissal, and recommended me to the senior member of the firm. I met Brady that evening. "My wife, Grace George, is going on the road in *Her Majesty*," he said. "She can't stay on tour long, because she's expecting a baby, but the job is yours if you want it." The baby was William A. Brady, Jr., afterward a prosperous manager, who lost his life in a burning bungalow not long ago while his mother was acting brilliantly in *Kind Lady*.

In those days every press agent's baggage included a trunk of "cuts," from which the press reproduced pictures of players and play. That night at the Manhattan Theater the trunk stood open in the office. Brady promised to express it after me to Hartford. "I'll lose the day waiting for it," I objected, and walked out carrying sixty pounds of photoengravings wrapped in newspaper. When I became Brady's general representative, a year later, Bill said, "I knew you'd wind up in this job when I saw you carry those cuts down the street to save a few hours."

The Manhattan began as the Eagle Theater in 1875, and as the Standard had witnessed the first New York performance of *Pinafore*. Many notable successes followed, including *Robin Hood*,

by De Koven and Smith, of whom more anon, and *Charley's Aunt*, both for the first time in New York. The Standard became the Manhattan in 1897, and the next year Brady and Ziegfeld leased the house and opened it with *Way Down East*, which, after a dismal start, became one of the greatest money-makers in theatrical history. Its author, Lottie Blair Parker, a matronly woman who never wrote anything else of importance, received \$5,000 as payment in full. From this attraction, which I took to Boston when Grace George closed *Her Majesty* to produce William A. Brady, Jr., I learned that the largest public for the theater is that which almost never goes to the theater. This knowledge, which suggests a long train of thought, I turned to good account when threatened with the quick failure of my first significant play, *The Fool*.

I learned much from Brady, the last of our great showmen. Beginning as a vendor of peanuts in a theater in San Francisco, he had become an actor and then a manager of pugilists and plays. He never ceased being proud of his acting, which was bad, and ashamed of his management of prize fighters, which was exceedingly good. Brady made a fortune with James J. Corbett, once champion heavyweight, and always a delightful person. Like so many of his contemporaries Bill had an almost unfailing instinct for the theater, and a code of business ethics that was eccentric, to say the least. He laughed heartily, many years later, when in an after-dinner speech, I said that he and two of his associates were the Three Musketeers of the Drama; their motto, "One for all and all for William A. Brady." Despite that, he was a kind man, when kindness wasn't too expensive—a big, heavy-set man with a bluff manner and a fat cigar forever in a corner of his mouth—and he gave me my first real opportunity. Perhaps "gave" is the wrong word.

My summer with *Way Down East* at the Tremont was pleasant and mutually profitable. As we had more patrons than seats, I found a lot of spare time which I spent reading in the public library and listening to the rich reminiscences of Ned Perry, the aged and charming publicity man for the Tremont, who had covered Victoria's Diamond Jubilee for the Boston *Herald*, and worked with John Stetson, the most striking figure of his day in sport and the

theater. Ned told me how the *Police News* leaped to success when its heavily indebted owner, refused white paper, was compelled to publish on pink. The blushing periodical stood out on the stands so that the edition was exhausted before night, and the innovation, Ned declared, was promptly adopted for the *Police Gazette*. Through Ned, too, I met Maurice Barrymore, sire of John, Lionel and Ethel, and himself an exceedingly fine actor.

It must have been from his father that John inherited wit and an appetite for hard liquor. Maurice used to spend most of his nights over a bottle with almost anyone who would laugh at his sallies. There were countless reports of his repartee, including his retort to the Texan to whom he applied unsmilingly the epithet of which an Owen Wister character was to say, "When you call me that, *smile*." The Texan roared, "If we were in Texas, I'd kill you for that," and Barrymore shrugged, "If your mother's virtue is a matter of geography"—and walked away. Barrymore spoke his last line on the stage in my presence. This was at a Sunday-evening benefit in the Tremont, where he started to recite Gilbert's ballad of the two men who had never been introduced. Halfway through, Barrymore stuck, and began again. He had repeated the first verse half a dozen times, when someone strode onto the stage and led him off. That night, Perry quoted to me a quatrain he said Barrymore had written as his own epitaph:

"He walked beneath the stars,  
And slept beneath the sun;  
He lived a life of going-to-do,  
And died with nothing done."

After *Way Down East* in Boston, and before the program called me "general representative," I became Brady's general handy man. Lugging a forty-pound typewriter, I covered the country far more thoroughly than that motion-picture hero of later days ever covered the water front. By the end of my second season I could say truly that I had been in every town of more than 25,000 population in America. Strange as it may seem, that kind of travel was easier then than now, when I am doing it again as a lecturer. Before the First World War there was frequent railway service from anywhere to everywhere; with the common use of motorcars, busses



and planes, more than half the schedules have been abandoned, and what would have been a very simple "jump" in 1900 becomes a complicated problem in this era of streamlined trains. As much of my salary was required at home, in the big cities I lived wherever I could, and concealed my economies by using the better hotels for letter writing. In the smaller towns lodging rarely cost more than a dollar or two a day, and was generally primitive. I was still ignorant of such luxuries as slippers and dressing gowns, but my overcoat went to bed with me rather frequently, and I shall never forget one room where I walked barefoot on frigid linoleum, broke the ice in a pitcher to wash my face, and looked from a window across the two miles of snow over which I was to tote that damned typewriter to the "depot."

The agent, or "man ahead of the show," had various responsibilities beyond publicity. He worked out railway schedules and made the agreements with railway representatives. When the booking office in New York left gaps in a route, he filled them in by what was known as "wildcatting." He sat down with the local manager to arrange the scale of prices and the expenditures. Sometimes the manager was to be found in his office, and sometimes not. I spent a day in Ohio pursuing one manager into the oil fields. When you caught your hare, in the small towns, you kept an eye on him. There were dozens of rackets, the best-known one by which that worthy rented you non-existent "one-sheet boards," on which to display lithographs. Every theater had its bill-room, whither you repaired to "lay out your paper"—a sort of early picture puzzle in which you combined various sizes of "printing" to cover various-sized billboards. You ordered the "printing," too, and took care of the accounting, and sometimes did the posting. If you were a conscientious agent, you visited all the local dramatic editors, and curried their favor. In odd moments you wrote the stuff they published, and the advertisements, and long reports and advice sheets for the home office and the company behind you. In that prehistoric age you also developed a technique for going on without funds. You learned to leave IOU's at the box offices, and you learned where that could not be done. In emergencies you learned, too, how to "double check" your baggage, which then the railway retained until you'd paid for your ticket. Once I lowered my typewriter and suitcase from a hotel window and rejoined

them in the back yard. That, however, was because Brady had given me a hundred-dollar bill in Albany, and on a Saturday afternoon in North Adams, Massachusetts, no one could change it. The experience recalls Mark Twain's "Million Pound Bank Note," and I hasten to add that I paid my bill next day from Springfield.

Brady had about a dozen attractions on tour, and in succession I chaperoned all of them—once, two at a time: Joseph Hart in *Foxy Grandpa* through one-nighters in Pennsylvania, and Al Leach and *The Three Rosebuds* through one-nighters in Ohio. That required covering twelve towns a week and the agility of the common flea. I handled Brady's "\$25,000 All-Star Revival" of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with Wilton Lackaye, Theodore Roberts, and a pack of bloodhounds and other celebrities. Roberts, whose Simon Legree, with a red beard, was a vivid piece of acting, later went to the movies. He didn't want to go, he told me, "but it's hard to get steady work in the theater after your salary reaches \$500. A man's a lot better off on \$100 a week." Throughout the summer of 1902, when my stepfather had developed cancer and was being tenderly cared for by my mother, who had come with him to New York, I managed the "colossal" Woman's Exhibition at the old Madison Square Garden. This display of "work of, by and for women the world over" cost \$80,000 and made a profit of \$400, which Brady gave me, because "you earned it; not I," on condition that I deposit the sum in a new bank of which he was a director. That institution is now part of the Chase National, and I still bank there, but my account became sadly anemic in its early infancy. Senator Roach's illness proved extremely expensive, and my salary remained \$50 a week, *some weeks*. Summers were jobless, except for the Woman's Exhibition, and occasional opportunities to provide personal publicity for stars.

Christmas Eve, 1901, was to be the beginning of the longest and happiest road I have ever traveled. I was in Boston again, at the Boston Theater, with a super-super *Way Down East* that included cows. Why anyone should want to see a cow on the stage, I can't imagine—but then I am equally dense as to why anyone cares which horse runs fastest, or which nine or eleven wins, or whether the lady in the pink tights at the circus will catch the gentleman in the black tights when he lets go of his flying trapeze.

I *do* enjoy bull fights and trained animals, because I'm always hoping the bull or the other animals will kill their tormentors. However, as the saying goes, that's neither here nor there. What matters is that, on Christmas Eve, 1901, being in Boston, I dropped into the Tremont to visit Ned Perry. We chatted about an hour, and Ned told me that his current attraction, Elsie de Wolfe in Clyde Fitch's *The Way of the World*, was being advertised by a lady. "The first woman press agent I ever saw," Perry said, "and one of the best. A quiet, hard-working little person, as Victorian as Victoria." On our way to the Tavern Club, midway down the stairs of the Tremont, Ned discovered he'd forgotten his pipe and went back for it. When he returned, a girl was climbing those steps. "That's the lady I was telling you about," Ned whispered, and presented me.

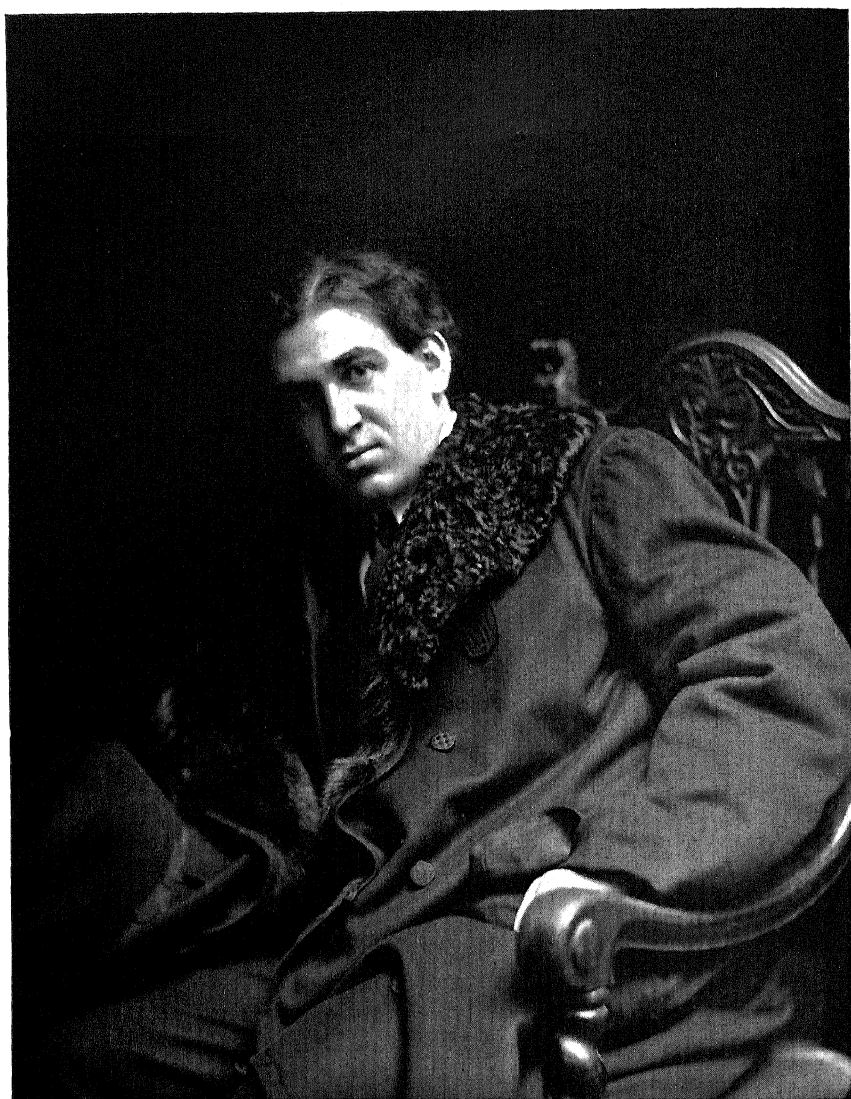
She proved to be even more charming than I had been led to expect. I decided I could dispense with the Tavern Club, and "the first woman agent" and I walked to the Old Corner Book Store, and bought a copy of *Prue and I*, by George William Curtis. At parting, I said, "I'll see you tomorrow"—and didn't. I had a bad cold and had been overworking. *Way Down East* was moving to Providence, and was to be succeeded by *Foxy Grandpa*. A girl named Nina Lednum, who had been in the chorus of E. E. Rice's *Evangeline* and was stranded, had been calling every day to beg that I get her an engagement with Joseph Hart. In vain I plead that there were no vacancies. The girl became an infernal nuisance, and finally, to be rid of her, I had suggested, "Hart's agent, George Murray, arrives the day after Christmas. If you'll come to the theater at noon I'll see what I can do." By then—God forgive me—I expected to be in Providence.

Christmas Eve, after leaving "the first woman agent," I bade farewell to my associates in the Boston Theater, planning to rest and get out of town late the next night. My cold had grown worse, and en route to the Reynolds Hotel I stopped in a pharmacy. The clerk popped a thermometer between my lips; it registered over a hundred. "You'd better see a doctor pretty quick," he advised. The hotel medico said I had diphtheria. "You can't be moved now," he declared, "and you can't stay here without endangering your neighbors." We compromised on a quarantine at my end of



### INTERIOR DECORATION IN THE '90's

The room of a critic and budding dramatist in Washington, D. C.



PRESS AGENT FOR THE SHUBERTS

At 24, my stoop and my fur coat still "suggested cartoons of Henry Irving."

the hall which, fortunately, was deserted otherwise. "I'll send a nurse," the doctor suggested, and when I replied that I couldn't afford one, his interest lapsed. After that I saw him only at long intervals.

Christmas, part of which I had counted on spending so agreeably, found me tossing in bed, very ill and absolutely alone. As I could afford private bathrooms no more than nurses, whenever my thirst became unbearable I walked ten yards down the hall for water. The day after Christmas I lapsed into spells of delirium, and felt sure one of these was responsible when I heard my door opened and, looking up, saw Nina Lednum. Of course I had forgotten our appointment. "What are you doing here?" I demanded.

"We had a date at the theater," she answered, "and when they told me you'd gone to Providence, I knew they were lying. I knew you wouldn't do a thing like that. So I came to the hotel, and when the clerk wouldn't let me up, I walked out, came back through the side entrance, and sneaked up here. What's the matter with you?"

"I've got diphtheria," I said, "and it's catching. You'd better get out quick."

"Where's your nurse?" Nina asked.

"I haven't one."

"You mean you're sick and alone?"

"Yes," I blurted, "and get out!"

"Say, listen," the girl said, "I wouldn't leave a dog that way." Off came her hat and coat, and for more than a week Nina never left that room, sleeping fully dressed on a sofa, and caring for me as though she had been my mother. Afterward, when my diphtheria proved to have been only an unusually virulent tonsillitis, I got her the job with *Foxy Grandpa* and never saw her again. In another chapter, I have speculated briefly on the kind of people who win eternal reward. I'm sure Nina was one of them. She was "a tough baby," George Murray said, but some of the best men and women I've known couldn't have got into heaven except under the Marquis of Queensbury Rules.

The following April in Philadelphia I met "the first woman press agent" again, and at the end of the week asked her to be my wife. She *has* been almost ever since, and that's what I meant by "the longest and happiest road."

## LOVE—AND A LIE OR TWO

**A**NNA MARBLE was not really the first woman press agent, but she was the first with any literary ability or other fitness for the work. As I have said, she came of one of the oldest theatrical families in America. Among my treasures are five ledgers in which my wife's great-grandfather, William Warren, kept a diary recording, with other items of ancient history, "No performance tonight on account death of General Washington." Except a few extracts in a book issued by the University of Pennsylvania, none of this diary, as full of interest as Pepys', has ever been used, and some day I hope to edit and publish it.

Miss Marble's father, who had been dead about a year, was Edward Marble, long principal comedian with Lotta, and author of the successful farce, *Tuxedo*. Also, he wrote the words of "Aileen Alanna," which was revived and became popular in the repertoire of John McCormack. My wife's mother, Kathryn Wilson, played for years in support of E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe. At the suggestion of her cousin, who was one of the firm that produced the piece, Miss Marble had left the Brooklyn *Eagle* to undertake the publicity of *Florodora*. As Ned Perry had remarked, she was—and still is—"as Victorian as Victoria"; a quiet and thoughtful little person, with the loveliest feet, hands, blue eyes and golden hair in the world. I can prove that by her daughter, who today is the living image of the lady I met on the stairs of the Tremont Theater in Boston.

Three months later I went to Philadelphia, representing Grace George, and in the office of the Walnut Street Theater, bumped

into Miss Marble, who was still with Elsie de Wolfe. For once in my life I acted with wisdom and celerity. At the end of that week Miss Marble and I sat together through Henry Miller's performance of *D'Arcy of the Guards*, and afterward, over a supper of fried oysters, I suggested a permanent alliance. For some reason I have never been able to fathom, the lady assented. Within the next fortnight I was in Minnesota with *Way Down East*, while my fiancée toured one-night stands in Pennsylvania for *The Way of the World*.

Most of the famous courtships of history have been conducted under difficulties, but few can have been more difficult than ours. Neither of us ever had more than a very little money, nor had that little long. Nearly every penny I earned, or could borrow, was going to pay doctors and nurses for my stepfather in New York. I had drawn almost half a year's salary in advance, and was in debt to a whole flock of those gentry who make up for lack of security by charging enormous rates of interest. Miss Marble had her own responsibilities, and neither of us dared lose a day of labor that took us to opposite corners of the continent. Even correspondence was difficult under the circumstances, and telegrams were rare luxuries. Our flame had been kindled during a week together; it had to burn without much additional fuel throughout most of the next four years. One of our meetings during the first two of these years makes Leander's swimming the Hellespont to visit Hero seem rather a simple excursion.

As I recall the adventure after nearly half a century, I was in Detroit one Sunday when I received a wire, "MY TRAIN PASSES THROUGH GOSHEN, IND., 6:50 TOMORROW MORNING." No train from Detroit did that, but I boarded one for Adrian, Michigan, where, I was assured, I might make a connection for Goshen. I might have, but didn't. Sharing his dinner with a kindly station agent at Adrian, I learned that presently a freight train would pause there briefly en route to Elkhart, whence a street railway ran to Goshen. "Climb aboard the caboose," the agent advised; "I ain't lookin'." The brakeman *was* looking—and not looking good to me. I compromised on the roof of a boxcar—I who quake with terror above the third rung of a ladder. Flat on my belly, clinging to whatever offered, I rode that rocking freight, and disembarked



at Elkhart shortly after midnight, when the last electric car had departed for Goshen.

Love laughs at locksmiths, but it was fairly grim about Goshen. An amiable though slightly inebriated farmer in a buckboard drove me part way, and I walked the longer half of ten miles through the night on a strange road that seemed thronged with snarling canines. If I said "Good dog" once, I said it a thousand times, and always insincerely. The sun had risen when I reached Goshen, swallowed a cup of coffee, and had exactly five minutes with my inamorata before she resumed her progress to Chicago. Most of our conversation dealt with the possibility of having a home of our own some day. That, too, was the theme of the letters we have kept. "Wouldn't it be wonderful," I wrote Miss Marble from Topeka, Kansas, "if we could build a little house by the sea." I had been reared on plains and in the mountains, and even the poet Schiller never longed more ardently to rest his eyes on salt water.

Too small a part of that summer of 1902 we spent in New York—my wife-to-be working on the *Evening Telegram* while I struggled with the Woman's Exhibition at Madison Square Garden. Either immediately before or after that, Grace George appeared in Frances Aymar Mathews' comedy, *Pretty Peggy*, which was to play a part in my destiny. Miss George's new leading man was an actor named Robert Loraine, imported from London where he had been a matinee idol. Brady signed a long-term contract at what seemed a huge salary, and was deeply depressed when just before his departure from England, Loraine became involved in some sort of amatory irregularity that was first-page news in New York. It included running away with another man's wife, or something else that wasn't condoned in those days, and Brady declared that he faced ruin. "What can we do?" he asked me. "People won't go to see an actor who has been mixed up in that kind of a mess. We can't deny the story, *can we?*"

"No," I answered, "but we can make it romantic." I had pondered the matter most of the preceding night. "We can print acres of articles showing Loraine to be a reckless, daring, devil-may-care fellow, not afraid of anything, including the other chap's wife. We'll make him a boxing, fencing, polo-playing young Englishman,

and when he gets here we'll photograph him doing all these things, and more. By the time we get through, Loraine will seem the sort of D'Artagnan who is always a more popular hero than Galahad."

For months I wrote, and newspapers and magazines all over the country printed these accounts of Loraine. When he arrived I found him a pleasant, soft-spoken youth, modest, unassuming, and completely unathletic. He regarded fencing foils as lethal weapons, and the spirited horse I hired as a savage beast. It would be going too far, perhaps, to say Bob was timid, but I certainly had gone farther afield in picturing him as reckless. There was no retracing our steps. Somehow, we got the devil-may-care photographs, and before *Pretty Peggy* went into rehearsal the matinee girls had accepted Loraine as a combination of Casanova with Athos, Porthos and Aramis.

Some time afterward, in Chicago, I saw Loraine astride a mare far more temperamental than the animal he had declined to mount in New York. "He's a great horseman," our manager told me, "and a promising boxer and fencer. He had to fence in the play, of course, but why he's gone in for the rest of it I can't say."

When England got into the First World War, Loraine joined the Royal Air Force, was decorated for valor, and promoted to a command. In 1918 when I dined at his home in London, Bob lifted his glass and proposed a toast "To my creator. The Lord didn't make me as I am; Pollock did. He invented for me a character so alluring that I spent the rest of my life trying to live up to it." I mention this chiefly as confirmation of my theory, and Plato's, that most of us draw a picture of ourselves as we should like to be, or have one drawn for us, and then do our utmost to achieve some kind of resemblance. Besides becoming a hero, Robert Loraine became one of our finest actors and my good friend, and I shall have more to say of him as this tale continues.

*Pretty Peggy* rejoiced in three excellent acts, and suffered from a fourth that was incredibly bad. The play dealt with Peg Woffington, and ended with the representation of a riot in Covent Garden Theater, which gave Brady opportunity for one of his famous mob scenes, but as he had to get both the riotous audience and the platform from which Peg addressed them into about thirty feet of actual stage, the result was cramped and unconvincing. The

Sunday before our scheduled premiere in Chicago I asked Brady why he didn't use the stage of our theater as that of Covent Garden, and our auditorium as that in which the riot took place. "Bring your mob down the aisles of the Grand Opera House," I suggested, "and the result should be sensational."

We were walking along Michigan Boulevard, and Brady stopped short.

"How long would it take you to write that?" he asked.

I replied, "About six hours."

"Go ahead," Brady said, "and then send out to the newspapers a statement that Miss George has a sore throat, and has postponed her opening to Thursday."

On the ancient typewriter that I lugged round the country with me, then perched on a trunk in the Bismarck Hotel, I pounded out the new last act for *Pretty Peggy* that later was to provide my first real chance as a dramatist. With this act the piece opened Thursday in Chicago and was an instant success. It was an even greater success in New York, where newspapers devoted pages to the mob in the auditorium of the Herald Square. The program continued to announce "a play in four acts by Frances Aymar Mathews," and my salary continued to be \$50 a week. For the scene itself, I had asked and received not a penny. What I wanted was opportunity, and it knocked at my door. A random remark in Chicago was responsible for this "good luck"—but long nights of writing scenarios in Washington and then comparing them with the original masterpieces were responsible for my being able to take advantage of it.

I had become "General Press Representative for William A. Brady" when Grace George reached the Herald Square, and soon afterward I received my first request for an autograph. Proudly I wrote my name on a card which turned up again that night in our ticket-box; above the signature, my unknown admirer had scrawled, "O. K. 2 seats." Of all God's goodness to me perhaps nothing has been more salutary than the fact that every inflation of my ego has been followed promptly by a puncture. I have seen so many human balloons go up, shining brightly, only to be destroyed by their own expansion.

In those days the art of "public relations" was in its infancy.

Most of us had never heard the word "propaganda," and the now ubiquitous mimeograph worked only in theatrical offices. If anyone had told us that press agents would be employed by great corporations, or that a Senate committee would find our government spending twenty-seven million dollars a year on publicity, we should have thought him mad. A hundred dollars a week was a big salary in our crowd, but it included a dozen men who were to earn distinction in other literary pursuits—Jimmie Forbes and Paul Wilstach, already mentioned; Jacques Futrelle, the novelist who went down with the *Titanic*; Eugene Walter and many others. Since we had little money for paid advertising, and regarded as routine the stuff regularly printed in the drama departments of newspapers, we fell back upon a device known as the "fake story" that achieved first pages and sometimes even international circulation. Melville Stoltz, who had worked with me "ahead" of Anna Held, may have been the inventor of this manufactured news, and its most conspicuous producer, perhaps, was a Dane named A. Toxen Worm.

The fake story became more than part of our job; it was a matching of wits with city editors, and the filling of a demand for news far in excess of the supply. If we were professional liars, we thought, so were Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens—and not very ingenious or entertaining liars, at that. Our common mission was the enlivening of a dull little planet, the chief difference between the authors' trade and ours being that they admitted writing fiction, while we had to baffle shrewd investigators pledged to print only facts. The conception of a fake story was merely the beginning of our task. It was not enough to declare that something had happened; it must be made to happen, and so that no one could prove it hadn't. Thus the celebrated story of Anna Held's milk baths was not merely an announcement that would have been received skeptically by the press. Melville Stoltz began by ordering twenty gallons of milk delivered every morning at the door of Miss Held's apartment. At the end of the month he refused to pay for the fluid, and the company, which may not have been averse to some publicity of its own, brought suit for the amount. That suit "shot the works," of course. Reporters naturally wondered what

Miss Held did with eighty quarts of milk a day, and were informed that she bathed in it. Stoltz figured the result at not less than five thousand columns of space at a cost of about two hundred dollars.

Whether anyone ever bought tickets to see Anna Held because she bathed in milk is a question—but no more a question than whether anyone buys cigarettes because the billboards say “They satisfy,” or coffee because mention of the brand introduces a ventriloquist on the radio. The theory is that incessant repetition of a name or a brand creates interest and demand, and results seem to have proved it correct. Certainly some of the fake stories of this theatrical era made fame and fortunes. A few of them actually created personalities, as mine did for Robert Loraine, and as the first of the Stoltz inventions turned a fifty-dollar-a-week trapeze performer at Sutro’s Baths, San Francisco, into the world-wide celebrity called Charmion who probably earned close to a million dollars. Except Miss Held’s milk baths and Charmion’s aerial disrobing, the two most enduring yarns, perhaps, were Toxen Worm’s tanbark story and mine as to Sarah Bernhardt’s playing under a circus tent. Worm achieved the former by dumping tons of tanbark in Forty-second Street to deaden sounds that annoyed Mrs. Patrick Campbell. As to my invention, there are still thousands of people who believe the Divine Sarah toured Texas under canvas.\* As a matter of fact, she gave only one performance in a tent. Sarah and I were employed by the firm of Sam S. and Lee Shubert, and the Shuberts were fighting the same Theatrical Trust that gave us a mission on the *Dramatic Mirror*. The story that this wicked monopoly prevented our finding a playhouse roof to cover a great actress, and drove art to the shelter of clowns and elephants, not only won headlines for her but sympathetic partisanship that was more valuable.

The fake story ran the gamut from simple but bizarre incidents, prepared in half an hour, to complete dramas, involving the hiring and rehearsal of scores of people and the expenditure of large sums. Sometimes both types backfired. When, just before Henry Miller’s

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\*In this connection, you may be amused by the account of why and how Bernhardt played in circus tents, given by Louis Verneuil in his book, *The Fabulous Life of Sarah Bernhardt*.

appearance in *Grierson's Way*, I advertised that the only existing manuscript had been lost, and that Miller would pay \$100 reward for its return, Henry phoned me in great excitement. "Damn it," he said, "I *have* lost a manuscript—one of dozens! What'll I do if someone finds it and claims the reward?" No one did, and this three-line advertisement under "Lost and Found" put Miller and *Grierson's Way* on front pages because of the odd idea that mislaying a few typewritten sheets might prevent opening a theater.

My most complicated and triumphant fake was evolved while Judge Alton B. Parker was campaigning for the Presidency. I wired Judge Parker's secretary that the choruses of two musical shows managed by the Shuberts had formed the Theatrical Women's Parker Association, with the purpose of persuading actors to go home to vote. Would Judge Parker receive a delegation from this society? The wire was signed "Nena Blake," and in due time Miss Blake received a courteous and conclusive reply. Judge Parker would not.

That message was a stunner. In the face of it there was only one thing to do—send along our delegation on the pretence that no answer to our communication had come to hand. Nine chorus ladies were picked out in a hurry, placed in charge of a shrewd newspaper woman who passed as another show girl, and the whole outfit was dispatched to the Judge's home at Aesopus, New York. The newspaper woman, Ruby Douglas, had instructions to register at the local hotel as a delegation from the Theatrical Women's Parker Association, and to parade herself and her group before all the alert correspondents in the little town on the Hudson. That done, we who had stayed behind got ready photographs of the pilgrims and waited.

The wait was not long. By nine o'clock that night the bait had been swallowed at Aesopus, and my office was crowded with reporters anxious to verify the story and obtain photographs. With characteristic kindness Judge Parker had lunched the party, allowed it to sing for him, and sent it away rejoicing. Most of the boys smelled a mouse, but the thing was undeniably true and could not be ignored. Only the New York *Herald* omitted to name either of the musical comedies for which the expedition had been undertaken. This was outside all the ethics of our craft, and determined

to make the paper come across, I arranged for a public meeting of the Theatrical Women's Parker Club.

The Democratic National Committee furnished us with a cart-load of campaign literature and with three speakers, one of whom was Senator Charles A. Towne. We provided the other orators. They were comedians and chorus girls identified with the two shows—Eddie Foy, Dave Lewis, Nena Blake, Grace Cameron and Amelia Stone. The juxtaposition was intentionally grotesque. I wrote nine political speeches for the occasion, held a rehearsal, and, when our advertisements failed to draw an audience, secured an overflowing one by sending to neighboring clubs. This fake accomplished its purpose, the *Herald* falling in line with specific mention of *The Royal Chef* and *Piff, Paff, Pouf*.

During my six years with Brady and the Shuberts I was responsible for at least fifty of these yarns, which altered a life or two, and made several reputations—including my own. The whole technique changed afterward, and good publicity became something quite different, and less dishonest. However, this particular dishonesty harmed no one and helped so many reporters in search of news that most of them were willing to lend a hand. It was much later, when we had overdone the thing and all press agents were suspect, that my wife phoned a city desk about a stagehand's falling from the fly gallery at the Hippodrome. The man had died in an ambulance. "Listen," the city editor barked; "you can't fool me with that kind of a fake!"

For *Pretty Peggy* at the Herald Square I contrived "the twenty-four-hour-play story" that started Margaret Mayo on a career in the course of which she wrote two famous farces. These, produced in reverse of what would seem their natural sequence, were *Twin Beds* and *Baby Mine*. Miss Mayo was supposed to have wagered that she could complete a play within twenty-four hours. The manuscript she typed at top speed whenever reporters or camera men were announced was one of my own abortive efforts, but Margaret later turned out several that were far from being stillborn. She was acting then in support of Grace George, and soon married Edgar Selwyn, an actor who also became a well-known dramatist and collaborated with me on a prosperous piece called *The Crowded Hour*.

I had never veered from my ambition to be a dramatist. Like the author of *The Mikado* I prefer that word to "playwright." Gilbert said he supposed "a playwright becomes a dramatist as a cow becomes beef—by dying." From the beginning, my goal was drama about matters of importance; drama that set forth a point of view and that might have what has been jeeringly described as "social significance." As I wrote later, I never was much interested in whether the girl with the red finger nails married the boy with the slippery hair. More of that heresy awaits you in this book. Meanwhile, I had a living to earn—several livings. I clung to press agency and a pay envelope until after the production of my fifth play—three of them financial successes that didn't help my own finances much.

During the first summer of my wooing, which was also the summer of the Woman's Exhibition, my stepfather's illness, and the celebration of *Pretty Peggy*, I unearthed a melodrama I had attempted in Washington, and polished it with midnight oil. Moreover, I actually found a producer—poor fellow!—and the play was revealed the following spring at Asbury Park. It was called *A Game of Hearts*, and, proving an hour too short that Saturday evening, May 30, 1903, had to be completely rewritten before the following Monday, when it opened at Proctor's Fifty-eighth Street Theater, New York. This, my first full-length play, *had* achieved full length by then, but it survived only one week. Its chief consequence to the Pollocks was the eventual marriage of my brother John, who appeared in the cast, to Minnie Church, who was its principal comedienne. They remain married, and their eldest son, named for me, is editor of a newspaper in New Jersey.

Brady had not forgotten my carpentry on *Pretty Peggy*, and one morning in that eventful summer of 1902 I was summoned to the office of our general manager, Fred Bert. Fred had been an important theatrical figure in San Francisco, where he had employed Brady, who afterward employed *him*. He was a huge man, and something had gone wrong with his feet, so that it was difficult for him to walk. A shrewd man, too, and a kindly one, within the limits of loyalty. Fred told me that Brady had bought the stage rights of Frank Norris' novel, *The Pit*, but had found no one willing to make a play of it. Only the day before, Augustus Thomas



had declined on the ground that "you can't dramatize descriptions of office buildings at night." "Bill was pleased with what you did for *Pretty Peggy*," Bert said; "why don't you ask him to give you a whack at *The Pit*?"

I hadn't "the nerve."

"He can't do worse than say 'no,'" Bert insisted. What he actually said was "yes," which amazed me until I learned that it was Bill who had made the suggestion to Bert. "Try your hand," Brady encouraged me. "I'm going to England with Frank Curzon; when I get back, we'll see what you've done." I nearly wept with joy when I reported the interview to my mother, and that evening Miss Marble and I celebrated recklessly with a fifty-cent table-d'hôte dinner at White's, somewhere on Broadway.

Curzon was the most important manager in London; I had been awestruck when he walked into our office, and breathless when I wrote the announcement of his alliance with Brady. Later, as my manager and friend, Frank was to present several of my plays in England. I have been a hero-worshiper all my life, and most of the worshiped have remained heroes to me even after the ground between us was somewhat leveled.

As I have said before, that was a busy summer, and when Brady returned I had completed only a little more than half of *The Pit*. Bill read the script and sent it back with a sheet of scratch paper on which he had noted, "Good, but *more love*. Too much financial stuff. Women not interested. *More love*. Act II good, but more love. Act III fine, but *lacks love*." I was jubilant, but the desperate state of affairs at home turned my thoughts to sordid considerations. "Don't you think I ought to get paid for this job?" I asked Brady one afternoon in the Gilsey House.

"Sure," Bill answered. "When it's finished, I'll give you \$1,000."

"You gave Mrs. Parker *five thousand* for *Way Down East*," I protested.

Brady was plainly astonished at my effrontery.

"I own the dramatic rights in that novel," he said. "Your three acts are so much waste paper unless I choose to produce 'em. I told you \$1,000; take it or leave it."

I took it.

However, as a special concession I was promised another thou-

sand if the play proved a success. Moreover, Brady suggested I'd better take a week off to finish the piece. I took two. Subsequently, on tour Bill and I dropped into a theater to see Alice Fischer in *Mrs. Jack*, and were attracted by a very young man in a very small part. "That boy's smile will get him a long way," Brady said, and engaged him for *The Pit*. He played Landry Court, and his smile did "get him a long way." The young man's name was Douglas Fairbanks.

When Brady produced the play with Wilton Lackaye as star, at Hartford in 1903, I was in Philadelphia with Grace George. Though I couldn't afford it, I felt I should attend the premiere. En route, at the office in New York, I found a memo to the effect that, since that newspaper wouldn't pay Western Union for a report from out of town, I'd better write a review of my play for the *Morning Telegraph*. I did so, quite modestly; I don't think I said the piece was *much* better than *Hamlet*.

At Hartford I had a shock; all our advertisements read, "*The Pit*, by William A. Brady and Channing Pollock." I protested, and Bill replied that he had provided a scenario—the page on which he suggested "More love." However, he dropped his name as author, and soon afterward Lackaye substituted his; *The Pit* came to be "by Wilton Lackaye and Channing Pollock." Another vigorous protest ended that usurpation. Meanwhile, *The Pit* was undeniably a hit. Only one review printed in New York after the opening in Hartford was favorable—the one in the *Morning Telegraph*. As already mentioned, I had written that myself, but I can't tell you how I was comforted by reading it. Most of the criticisms insisted I had lost the spirit of the novel. A more valid consolation, perhaps, might have been a letter I had from the author's widow as to my "splendid sympathy with, and understanding of Mr. Norris' point of view."

At noon that day I went back to Philadelphia, and shortly *The Pit* went to Chicago, where it was drawing capacity audiences when the Iroquois Theater fire, with appalling loss of life, closed every place of amusement in the Windy City. In addition to my salary Brady paid me \$50 a week for 18 weeks, a total of \$900. The remainder of the promised thousand he deducted as wages not earned in the two weeks I took off to complete the play. That

would have ended the matter, since, when I claimed the bonus I was to get if the piece succeeded, Brady insisted that it hadn't, but shamed by another manager, eventually he continued the \$50 installments another twenty weeks. *The Pit* earned a profit in excess of half a million dollars, of which I had nineteen hundred. That was great luck; the customary royalties would have amounted to a fortune, and fortunes aren't good for boys in their early twenties.

At eighty, Bill is still a showman and still my friend. The ethics of his deal with me were those of his trade and time. Bill believed he was merely making an advantageous agreement and giving me a lift—in both of which beliefs he was justified. I have suffered far more at the hands of other managers who remain my friends. "To understand everything is to forgive everything." Most of that group would cheerfully and benignly "slip one over," at a cost to you of several thousand dollars, and then as cheerfully and benignly throw away twenty times the amount on a play, or give the larger part of it to someone in need. What really mattered was that the theater was in their bones. At this moment I'd gladly write another play on the same terms if there were another William A. Brady to produce it.

## HAPPY DAYS!

IN THE autumn of 1903 the Shuberts offered me \$75 a week to operate their press department, and as Brady was unwilling to add \$25 to my salary I took the job. My need of money had never been more pressing. Senator Roach's life had been prolonged through most of the preceding year without the faintest hope of doing more than continue his agony and add to the burdens of those who cared for him. In our little apartment, on Seventh Avenue at 114th Street, sleep was almost impossible because of the Senator's cries, and yet at the end physicians resorted to oxygen to hold off the mercy of death. We are kinder to animals.

My helpless little mother was now more helpless than ever, and, except for her children, quite alone. The post with the Shuberts kept me in New York, and in the circumstances that was important. It was agreeable, too, since Miss Marble had left the *Evening Telegram* to undertake publicity for Oscar Hammerstein's Victoria Theater at Seventh Avenue and Forty-second Street. As the Shuberts had transferred their headquarters from the Herald Square to the Lyric, a few doors west, the change of employers also changed the conditions of my courtship, which until then had been conducted chiefly by the correspondence-school system.

The Shuberts were three brothers, Sam, Lee and Jake, who, beginning as clerks in a shop in Syracuse, had become ushers and ticket-sellers in their local playhouse, and with local backing had taken the lease of the Herald Square in 1900. They knew little more of literature and drama than a cow knows of the albuminous content of milk, but that was equally true of almost every manager in New York. Any one of the brothers might have been mistaken

for an office boy, as I mistook Sam when I applied for a position with the firm. In spite of these handicaps—if they *were* handicaps—the Shuberts were to become and remain the greatest power in their field. When I entered their employ, less than three years after they came to town, the trio had leased five of the city's leading theaters, had a dozen attractions touring or on Broadway, and had undertaken a David and Goliath struggle with the Theatrical Trust that shortly was to give them control of almost every first-class playhouse in the United States. Sam, whose picture hangs in the lobby of every theater in their chain, was the guiding spirit of the corporation, but its greatest advances were made after his death, and the Shuberts are the only managers of their era who survived the disintegration of what significantly is still called "show business."

I have never embarked upon any new task without fear and trembling, but this promotion to one of the most important positions in the theater of that day almost made me a nervous wreck. Sam, who was kindness itself, revealed his executive genius that morning when he said, "Don't ask me about *anything*. You're running the department. So long as you run it well, we'll let you alone; when you don't, we'll let you go." Even now I envy that ability to delegate authority. The utter lack of it has always doubled my labor and subtracted from my chance of success. Once many years later when I dismissed an assistant for not doing his work, and he replied that he couldn't because I never left him any to do, I had to admit that he was right, and restore him to his post.

The advantage of beginning a task in fear and trembling is that one puts into it everything he has, and then some. As I had looked for more work to do everywhere except on the Joy Line Docks, so in my windowless, top-floor cubbyhole in the Lyric I continually multiplied my duties. Within a month, my self-imposed office hours were from nine in the morning until two the next morning. Most of my days were spent in essential interviews; other work began when the day was ended. During my stay at the Lyric I never once left the theater through its front entrance. That was always locked before my quitting time, and with a searchlight I crossed the dark and deserted auditorium to make my exit through the stage door. Sundays I stayed home and wrote magazine articles

and plays. I was twenty-three years old, still weighed 116 pounds, and except for my visits with Miss Marble I had very little time off in those three years. I have worked that way most of my life, but I'm not sure I recommend it. There is truth in my wife's occasional observation that it makes one an automaton—a machine that drives ahead, uninterested in and unaffected by anything but its job.

Among the labors I created for myself at the Lyric was the writing, editing and publishing of what may be the only magazine that ever failed because of too much success. The Shubert side of their fight with the Theatrical Trust had remained chiefly their secret. Newspapers rightly took no part in the quarrel, and I felt that we deserved and should win public support. Elbert Hubbard's *Philistine*, the first pocket-size magazine, I believe, was enjoying a considerable vogue, so I founded one of the same dimensions which I christened *The Show*. It was attractively illustrated, and contained, besides my editorials on the conflict, short stories, verse and essays—chiefly from my own pen, though we had a few noted contributors. The original price of the periodical was one cent—ten cents a year. What we wanted was circulation, and we got it. "Send a dime," we advertised in the programs of our theaters, and the coins rolled in so fast that often my office resembled the countinghouse of a street railway. Six months after we started, *The Show's* subscription list was in excess of a hundred thousand, and I began worrying. Carrying no advertising, we lost about four cents on each copy sold, and unless sales were checked, we faced ruin.

I took the announcements out of our programs and raised our price to three cents—twenty-five cents a year. That afternoon a representative of a news company dropped in to order fifty thousand copies a month. In March 1906 we printed and sold nearly a quarter of a million magazines, and had employed a staff to handle the business. That couldn't go on. I engaged an energetic young man to solicit advertising that would cut down our loss, but we were "a house organ," and advertisers were coy. The Shuberts proposed dropping the venture, and the energetic young man suggested that he and I take it over, form a stock company, and publish *The Show* without the ties that had crippled it. However, I didn't want to be an editor any more than the Shuberts wanted to

be publishers, so in the end we presented our growing business to the energetic young man, and he hired another editor. As *The Show* had been distinctly what our announcements called it, "A magazine of personality," its new publisher found that he had succeeded where we failed in checking circulation. Within less than a year *The Show* was extinct and the only files of it in existence, so far as I know, are one on my shelves and another in the New York Public Library.

Someone suggested that I should judge the almost numberless plays that were submitted for production, and—heaven knows how—I took on this job, also. Two young women, one of them my assistant secretary, winnowed the possible wheat from the too obvious chaff, and then my own selections were passed on to the Shuberts. None of us knew very much about drama, and it seems to me now little less than a miracle that not many of the hundreds of manuscripts I rejected were ever acted, and not one successfully. Most literary chaff is such sterile stuff that there isn't much chance of mistaking it. The least trace of wheat, or fairly conclusive evidence of the lack of it, appears in the first dozen lines of a play, and I rarely pursued it beyond the first dozen pages. My experience, I find, has been that of the majority of professional readers of books and plays. Very few of their authors have ideas, and fewer still suspect that writing is a trade, to be learned like any other. The man who wouldn't think of trying to fashion a horse-shoe without an apprenticeship in a smithy will undertake the most difficult of the arts without training. "Everyone," Edna Ferber said, "asks me how to be a writer, but no one asks me how to write." Not that Miss Ferber, or any other author, could tell them. *That* is a thing one finds out for one's self, chiefly by reading and writing and discarding. My favorite anecdote, perhaps, is that of the tyro who asked Mozart how to compose symphonies. "You are young," Mozart said. "Why not begin with songs?"

"*You*," insisted the aspirant, "had composed symphonies when you were fourteen."

"Yes," Mozart answered, "but I didn't ask how."

One of the embryonic dramatists who came to the Lyric brought a six-act tragedy in blank verse. He lived in Buffalo, he

said, and would call on me again at any time I suggested. "I'll write you," I promised. "You needn't make the long trip to New York."

"I've got to come, anyway," my visitor answered. "I'm a brakeman on the New York Central."

There were many such. Quite the most pornographic play I ever saw, a manuscript entitled "The Passionate Persian Princess," proved to be the product of a suburban housewife, happily married and the mother of five children. "I thought that was what the public wanted," she confessed, artlessly. A great many more widely acclaimed authors and publishers and producers have shared her conviction. In three years of play reading I recommended only three pieces and, by some chance, all three proved successful, though only one of them was presented by the Shuberts. That was *The Road to Yesterday*, by Beulah Marie Dix and Evelyn Greenleaf Sutherland, and the others were *The Heir to the Hoorah*, by Paul Armstrong, and *The Rose of the Rancho*, by Richard Walton Tully.

Dick brought this latter piece to me with a curious comment. "Two managers have had the manuscript," he said, "and both died before they could read it. They were Fred Hamlin and Kirke La Shelle—and you're the third man!" I told Dick I wasn't superstitious, and finding much promise in the drama, sent it to my employers. Months later Dick returned to inquire what had become of his play. "You should have had a verdict long before this," I told him. "I'll look into the matter."

No one could find a trace of *Juanita*, which was the original title. It had never been entered in our records, which were scrupulously kept. Finally Lee Shubert said, "I'll look in Sam's bag." He did, and found the manuscript. Sam had taken it with him on the journey to Pittsburgh that ended in collision with a trainload of dynamite, and Sam's almost instant death. Dick said, "He was the third manager"—which, of course, was stretching the point, because I had been the third person to consider the play, though I wasn't a manager. David Belasco afterward produced *The Rose of the Rancho*, and Dick Tully wrote *The Bird of Paradise*, one of the greatest financial successes in the history of our theater.

My own ambition to be a dramatist was not dead, or sleeping



much more than I did in those days. On successive Sundays, I wrote *The Great Adventurer* for my friend Tom Shea, who presented it under the title of *Napoleon, the Great*; a comedy called *The Little Gray Lady*, that was acted at the Garrick Theater, and a dramatization of Miriam Michelson's popular novel, *In the Bishop's Carriage*, published by The Bobbs-Merrill Company which has issued these memoirs. I'm not sure that any of the three proved that "the better the day, the better the deed." Each of them had a history that must await a chapter on my adventures as a dramatist. For now, suffice it to say that my schedule called for completion of an entire act or an entire magazine article every Sabbath, and that I fell behind this schedule only once—when I had mumps!

All three pieces were presented while I was employed by the Shuberts, who began feeling that they might use a talent they had not suspected when they hired me. The greatest money-maker for the Theatrical Trust had been a dramatization of General Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur*, and the brothers Shubert now decided to enter into competition with this story of the early Christians with a play by Hal Reed called *The Nazarene*. Reed was an author of cheap melodramas, and none was cheaper—to everyone but the Shuberts—than this opus. Lee and I saw it one evening in the autumn of 1905 in Newark, New Jersey, and I advised him to "shut up next Saturday." That couldn't be done, Lee explained, because, with Charles Dalton and Margaret Wycherly as its stars, *The Nazarene* was booked for the following Monday at the Studebaker Theater, Chicago. "You'll have to rewrite it," Lee said.

"Between now and Monday?"

"Between now and the day after tomorrow."

That seemed not too difficult. My press agency kept me busy next day, but that night I locked myself in with my secretary, Jack Morris, who is still secretary to Lee Shubert, and began dictating *The Nazarene*. I had intended only alterations, but a new play proved easier. In the circumstances I felt justified in helping myself to bits from a dozen other dramas that had exploited the early Christians—*The Sign of the Cross*, in which Dalton had made his greatest hit, and several more. One of these was *Ben Hur*. Since we were going to put that production out of business, perhaps I thought it only fair to preserve a fragment for posterity.

Before dawn I had completed three acts, when I ran out of Roman names. Not knowing where to get them at five in the morning, I christened one character Sapolius, after the soap mentioned in my first chapter, and so he remained until the play ended its run a week later.

After breakfast I asked Lee Shubert whether he would like to read what I had written. "Good Lord, no!" he said, but had I kept the lions? These were two decrepit beasts whose duty was to manifest an appetite for the Christian Maiden—otherwise Margaret Wycherly. They had been eliminated early the preceding evening. "Those lions cost me \$500," Lee insisted, "and I want 'em in." They were restored to the manuscript, and the next day they and we went to Chicago. *The Nazarene* was to open there Sunday, October 22, 1905, at the Studebaker Theater, and my own play, *In the Bishop's Carriage*, the following night at Powers'.

At the dress rehearsal of *The Nazarene* on Saturday everything ran smoothly until we reached the moment of martyrdom. The lions were at the back of the stage, surrounded by black iron bars. In front of these was a space of five or six feet, and in front of that were wooden bars painted silver and high-lighted by two baby spots. From the auditorium the black bars were invisible, and the Christian Maiden, while amply protected, seemed to be at the mercy of the animals. These, however, failed to rise to the occasion. When Margaret was deposited in their midst, they glanced at her indifferently and one of them yawned. That wouldn't do, and the rehearsal stopped while we consulted. "Put a copper plate on the bottom of the cage," I suggested, "and connect it with the switchboard. Then, when the Christian Maiden is thrown to the beasts, we can give them the shock that evidently she fails to give them."

It worked, and an hour or two later we retired in the confidence that this scene would lift the audience out of their seats. The next evening a crowded house watched spellbound while Margaret was thrust into the den, and an electrician turned on the current. Of course the audience couldn't see the latter part of the proceeding. What it saw was the Christian Maiden thrown to the lions, which sprang to their feet, took one surprised look at her, and then tried to break out through the other side of the cage. There was up-

roarious laughter, and both lions and play were laid away in moth balls the following Saturday. *In the Bishop's Carriage* had its premiere on Monday and prompted some of the most scathing criticisms I had ever read. For the first time in my life I occupied a drawing room on the train back to New York. I was afraid of being seen and recognized as the man responsible for two complete flops in as many evenings.

These occasionally necessary trips out of town found me returning to a desk so heaped that I was tempted to throw up my hands and resign. My desk pad was divided into ten-minute periods, and frequently these were filled days in advance. I have always wanted as much work as I could do, and I have always had more than any man could do without inviting disaster. My former ancestors gave me exceptional health, but it has broken repeatedly under the strains that, for reasons beyond human comprehension, I have imposed upon myself. Our fight with the Theatrical Trust compelled me to be hospitable to every newspaper man who visited New York. Every day was a succession of these appointments, and of conferences with our printers, our road agents, our actors and authors. At night I wrote press material for twenty or thirty theaters and as many attractions, designed pamphlets and billing, kept abreast of a huge correspondence, and got out *The Show*. Sundays, as aforesaid, I wrote plays. No one, perhaps, ever had a more definite idea of the kind of plays he wanted to write, but this indulgence was beyond my means. I wrote whatever carried promise of immediate reward, making it as good as circumstances and capacity permitted. Alan Dale gave up his side line as drama critic of *Ainslee's Magazine*, and I took it over—at \$75 for 5,000 words and a promise of \$25 more if and when my reviews proved popular. They were sufficiently so for me to acquire the same post on *Smith's Magazine*. I sold verse and stories to my old friend, that remarkable genius Bob Davis, on *Munsey's*, and contracted with Theodore Dreiser for a series of articles in his *Broadway Magazine*. Believe it or not, Dreiser, who had not yet startled his readers with the candor of *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, rejected the series because of a paragraph dealing with the oldest profession. To the *Washington Times* I had contributed the equivalent of half an

ordinary novel each week; from 1903 to 1906, the equivalent of a full-length book was only part of my stint. However, I was earning close to \$10,000 a year, and had made a deep dent in my debts. The Shuberts had raised my salary to \$100. With a family to support I didn't dare marry until I had paid every penny I owed, but I had promised myself not to wait long afterward.

Working as I did then, it seems incredible that I found opportunity for personal contacts, but this period marked the beginning of many enduring associations. My only genius has been a genius for friendship. My wife says I have gone through life like a St. Bernard dog, putting my paws on people's shoulders and wagging my tail violently. Be that as it may, I admit liking people. I have never met a man or woman I *disliked*, and if half a dozen business acquaintances have behaved badly, in most cases I have been able to see their side as well as my own. There isn't a grain of the introvert in my make-up. All I think, feel or know belongs to the first-comer, and all I do or have done is shouted from the housetops. That has one advantage; I can never be blackmailed, since every skeleton in my closet has been taken out and paraded, arm in arm with me, along the highways and byways. I have been all things to all men and a number of women—including, as I have written frequently, bishops and burglars, capitalists and chorus girls, barons and bootblacks. As I set down these words, the morning's mail brings warm messages from my barber in New York, a world-famous author in London, the president of a university in Boston, and a convict in Sing Sing. I have made friends in five minutes who remained friends fifty years, and I have never lost a friend except by death—if then. Hundreds of people dislike me intensely, but by far the greater part of them are people I have never met.

My road press agency, and that in New York, had put me in touch with many remarkable men and women, from each of whom without exception I learned something. Several of these were at the beginning of distinguished careers; a few were at the end. I met Eugene Walter, another press agent, in a bill-room at the Walnut Street Theater, Philadelphia. He was an uncouth youngster, dreaming, as I did, of writing plays. Later he became one of our leading dramatists; author of *Paid in Full* and *The Easiest Way*. Margaret Wycherly's husband, at that time, was a funny, round

little man, chock-full of ideas. Whenever and wherever I saw Bayard Veiller, he would cling to my lapel while he raved over a new notion. Frequently these originated in newspaper items, one of which he saw as the plot for a short story. "What would you get for the story?" I asked.

"Twenty-five dollars," guessed Veiller.

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars not to write it," I said—and did. That item became the theme of *Such a Little Queen*, one of my earliest plays. Bayard had fifty other plots before night and made me listen to all of them. Shortly afterward he wrote *Within the Law*, which made a fortune—though not for him—and followed it with *The Thirteenth Chair* and *The Trial of Mary Dugan*.

My favorite among the Shubert stars was Lillian Russell, of whose beauty nothing new can be said. Countless photographs have shown her burnished blonde hair, her lovely eyes, and the figure fashionable then, which suggested a magnified hourglass. What was most beautiful in Miss Russell, I am convinced, had been written in her face by great kindness and warm sympathy. When she was admired and besieged as few women have been, I used to sit in her dressing room at the Casino Theater, chatting about everything and nothing. She would go to infinite trouble in support of a press story I had invented, not because she needed or cared for publicity, but out of a desire to help. Once I wrote and she signed a series of articles on how to be beautiful which were printed in the New York *Evening World* and widely syndicated. I got the details from Miss Marble, who had specialized in them for the *Evening Telegram*. Miss Russell said, "I never did one of those things, or used one of those preparations, but nobody'd believe that, and if these articles are what is expected of you and me, go ahead." The following Christmas Miss Russell gave me a scarfpin of rubies, diamonds and emeralds in the shape of a horseshoe the size of a watch. I always stuck it in my tie when I entered her dressing room, and removed it when I left. Many years later, when she was the wife of Alexander P. Moore (P for Pollock, though we were not related), who became our Ambassador to Spain, Miss Russell sat behind my wife and me in a theater. Touching my shoulder during the first intermission, she said, "I noticed you when you came in. Where's my scarfpin?" I didn't tell her it had been stolen while I was moving from one apartment to another.

Maxine Elliott was another Shubert star, and the second great beauty of her time—as brunette as Miss Russell was blonde, but less approachable. I have always remembered her comment one night when I showed my astonishment at an allusion she made to her own loveliness. “Don’t be a fool,” Miss Elliott laughed. “How could I be unaware of it—after years of reading about it, hearing about it, and seeing it. I could *pretend* not to be aware, but that would be real vanity. There is no other conceit as offensive as pretended humility.” She was right of course. Maxine Elliott was a mediocre actress, and admitted that as freely. She owed her success to her beauty, which has been a handicap to many good actresses. Gladys Cooper, in London, and Jane Cowl, in New York, were so celebrated as beauties that almost no one ever mentioned their skill and talent.

The greater the standing of these players, of course, the greater the ease with which they were “handled.” Sarah Bernhardt, who was brought over for another farewell tour without expectation of profit but to bolster our list of attractions, was a conspicuous example. Incidentally, Bernhardt had said farewell so often that a wit branded this tour “much adieu about nothing.” The Divine Sarah was a charming and companionable person, with a sense of humor that took in herself and everyone else. When she arrived Charles Henry Meltzer, a critic of the period, chatted with her in her native language for an hour in her rooms at the Majestic Hotel, and then published a two-column interview. “Wonderful,” Bernhardt laughed, “since I couldn’t understand a word of his French, and he couldn’t understand a word of mine!” Her own frequently bizarre behavior amused her no less; it was merely showmanship, and Sarah said so. When she received another newspaper man in Washington, leaning languorously against the edge of a window and holding a long-stemmed flower in her hand, he had hardly left the room when she asked me, “Was I impressive? One must supply candy for children.” First and last, Bernhardt was what the theater loves to call “a good trouser.” When I apologized for a dirty, dripping basement dressing room in a one-night-stand theater in the South, she shrugged, “Oh, my infant, do you suppose this is the worst room I ever dressed in?”

To everybody’s surprise Bernhardt’s tour earned a large profit,

and in appreciation the Shuberts gave me a jeweled match safe that afterward proved to be thin gold plate and paste. I hasten to add that I doubt whether they had ever seen the box, purchased by an agent who probably did well for himself. In 1903 the Russians massacred numbers of Jews at Kishinev, and the Shuberts presented Sarah at a benefit for the survivors, at the Casino Theater. Lee suggested that I ask Mark Twain to introduce her. To me Samuel Clemens was about the most important man on earth, and I was awe-struck at the idea of meeting him. However, we made an appointment, and when I rang the bell of his house in lower Fifth Avenue he opened the door himself.

He was dressed in white linen and puffing a big cigar—the picture still familiar to his admirers. We sat on a couch in the front room, and anxious not to waste the time of a great man, I tried to get down to business. That was at four o'clock. Three hours later Mark Twain was still telling me stories, and I was thinking more of my time than his. One of these anecdotes related how Samuel's mother had persuaded his father to pay three dollars each for three balcony seats from which to see the famous actress during one of her first tours of America. "We had two French women sewing for us," Mark Twain said, "and mother made the mistake of remarking that she didn't think they got enough to eat. 'And,' father raged, 'we're going to waste nine dollars on play-acting!' He gave the nine dollars to the two women, and they added a dollar to buy two *orchestra* seats and see Bernhardt."

I left shortly after seven o'clock—too late to dine and still reach my post at the Lyric. Mark Twain followed me into Fifth Avenue, where, at last, I asked him to introduce Bernhardt. "Certainly," he said. "When and where? Write it on the back of that envelope." I did so, and the humorist arrived twenty minutes before the doors opened, to make a witty and graceful address.

Three friendships that began in this period were with as many of our principal dramatists. Charles Klein, author of the enormously successful *The Lion and the Mouse*, was a little man with a mane of white hair who gave me one of the three pieces of advice that impressed me most at this time. "You want to write plays," Charlie said. "Well, don't write about the man who goes up in a balloon, because none of your audience knows how he feels, or cares a damn. Write about the fellow who's afraid of losing his

Clyde Fitch

113 EAST 40TH STR.

Telephone: 6302-3874

Feb: 9:

Dear Mr. Pollock:

I want to see  
your "Little Girl" who is a big little  
lady I think. I

want to see you  
personally how

much? Like V.

plenty! Will you

can you, come

APPROBATION FROM SIR HUBERT,

otherwise Clyde Fitch, one of the two leading dramatists of his time  
in America.



+ lunch with me  
tomorrow, Sat =  
at 1:30?

a line tonight  
or a message on  
the phone is all  
that is necessary  
if you or me

come. Yrs. Loyally.

Chas. F. E.

job, or who has lost it and is hungry, or who sits at the bedside of his sick child. Everybody knows how that man feels, and putting it into scenes they'll recognize and that will hit home is the secret of good authorship and a good income." Ever since, I've played in my own back yard, trying to picture the everyday citizen, with his everyday hopes and fears and experiences, and to show him as I believe him to be—a real hero. At the cost of critical acclaim, I've never felt an interest in the *uncommon* man, and particularly in what I regard as clinical cases. Klein added another lesson for the melodramatist: "Get your heroine in a corner, beset from all sides, and when you can make your audience want to climb over the footlights to her rescue you've got a success."

The two shining lights among writers for our theater in those days were Augustus Thomas and Clyde Fitch. They rivaled each other in the number and popularity of their plays, and had no other rival. Thomas, of whom I have spoken before in this book, wrote vigorously and close to the soil. Fitch was said to "embroider his plays." Thomas, whose last great success was *The Witching Hour*, was thought to be stand-offish, and a bit of a stuffed shirt. When we became intimate, somewhat later, I found that he was merely timid and whistled to keep up his courage. He had been employed in the railway yards in St. Louis, was self-educated, and always felt something lacking in consequence. Among other things, he was a fine orator and a famous wit. Since he had delivered as many addresses as anyone in the country, I once asked him, "When can a man make a speech without being scared to death?"

Gus replied, "When he can't make a speech any more."

There was wisdom in this; no one who isn't afraid that he won't do his job well ever does it well. Later, I spent a week end with Thomas at New Rochelle, and recall an argument in which Frederick Remington, the artist, was so acrimonious that in the end he apologized by putting his arm around Gus and observing, "What would happen if we ever agreed about anything?"

Instantly Thomas answered, "I'd be wrong, Fred."

My friendship with Fitch began when he wrote me, "I went to see your *Little Gray Lady*, who is a *Big Little Lady*, I think. I want to tell you personally how *much* I like your play. Will you, and can you, come and lunch with me tomorrow, Saturday, at 1:30?" That letter, which still hangs in my study, meant so much to me

that since then I have written every author or actor whose work I liked. A few years ago Thornton Wilder, whose *Our Town* had left me enthusiastic, and to whom I mentioned Fitch's letter in explanation of mine, responded with a promise to "carry on this heart-warming custom."

Fitch and I lunched together that Saturday in his luxurious home on Fortieth Street, and every other Saturday during the remainder of his life. He was a true Sybarite, and surrounded himself with costly objects of art from all over the world. When these overflowed his places in town and at Greenwich, Connecticut, he built a third residence at Katonah, New York, which he called The Other House. I used to think these extravagances would ruin him, but when he died his art collection, which he had purchased with sense and understanding of values, proved to be the most lucrative part of his estate. Fitch was a tall, heavy man, and rather effeminate. His generosity could be embarrassing. One night when we had dined with him Jimmie Forbes admired a small cigarette box, which Fitch insisted on his carrying away. Jimmie did so, believing the box to be an inexpensive trinket, and returned the gift later when he found that it was a Florentine masterpiece worth several thousand dollars.

At the end of our association I discussed with Fitch a piece I intended writing for George Tyler. Months later, when he was about to leave for Paris, Fitch summoned me and said, "I've just finished a play that will be produced next fall, and now I suspect that, unconsciously, I've used a good deal of your story. I can't withdraw the play; suppose we divide the royalties." I declined that, of course, and Clyde, full of gratitude, proposed buying me something he had seen and liked. Remembering the cigarette box, I demurred, but Clyde had been fascinated by the object, and insisted on getting it. We drove to a shop in lower Sixth Avenue, and I received the gift. It was a huge wooden lead pencil, and cost twenty-five cents. Fitch sailed next morning and never returned. His play was *The City*, and Virginia Gerson, who published many of his letters to me in a collection of several hundred, omitted one, written from quarantine, in which he dwelt on the similarity of our plots and repeated his offer to share the royalties. Miss Gerson, I suppose, thought the incident discreditable to Fitch; I can imagine

no better example of his generosity and fine sense of honor. The likeness between the two plays was very slight; Clyde was a dramatist of the first rank, and I was a tyro who certainly could have turned out no such success as *The City*. Both Thomas and Fitch were big men, and even in an art so ephemeral as that of the drama I am astonished that both have been so nearly forgotten.


All my life has been busy and happy—as cause and effect, no doubt—but I was never busier and happier than at this time. The immense amount of work I turned out seems never to have left me without friendships and interesting adventures. Bayard Veiller, Adolph Klauber, who was critic of the *New York Times* and had just married Jane Cowl, and I lunched with two or three others every week at Rector's, and called ourselves the Shot-at-Sunrise Club. We began by each writing the name of an actor he thought should be shot at sunrise, or earlier, and then we solemnly drew one name and recorded it. The *Evening World* got hold of the list and published it, costing us a good many friends. Also, to provide an exchange of information as to people who got free theater tickets without reason, I founded the National Association of Press Agents, which, with myself as first president, became the Friars' Club. Such tickets were punched to distinguish them from those that had been bought, and were called Annie Oakleys after the lady in Buffalo Bill's show who shot holes through various targets.

Most of my lunches and many of my dinners, of course, were eaten in the company of Miss Marble. She was still at Hammerstein's Victoria, as fully occupied as I and quite as successfully, and these half-hours or hours were brands snatched from the burning. Oscar Hammerstein once asked my prospective wife, "Are you in love with Pollock?" and when she replied in the affirmative, inquired, "Why don't you marry him?" Miss Marble said something evasive about few marriages seeming to result in more than a year or two of happiness.

"Good God!" exclaimed Oscar. "What do you want? A year or two of happiness—why, that's more than most people ever achieve in their whole lives!" He puffed at his inevitable cigar and added, "You two might beat that. You're both so damned busy you won't have time to bore each other."

That proved prophetic.

I MARRY—AND GIVE UP MY JOB

 OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN seemed and seems to me a remarkable genius; not because he built theaters—by the 1920's almost everybody in New York was doing that—but because he built them with vision, initiative and daring. An example was his combination of two auditoriums and a roof garden in the Olympia, at Forty-fourth Street and Broadway, when this corner was said to be “half way to Albany.” Before that he had constructed the Harlem Opera House in the wilderness of 125th Street. The Victoria, at Seventh Avenue and Forty-second Street, his fifth venture, was followed promptly by the adjoining Republic, which became Belasco's and then a burlesque theater recently closed by the police, and by the Manhattan Opera House, where Oom Oscar produced grand opera in successful opposition to the Metropolitan. Times Square, which owed its development to him, should have been called Hammerstein Square.

Oscar, the gentlest of souls, was always opposing someone or something. Born in Germany in 1847, he came to this country at sixteen and worked at his trade, which was cigar making. Before long he had invented machinery for this manufacture that earned the first of the fortunes he made and lost. Oscar invented almost everything, including a tie that, when soiled, could be reversed, *ad infinitum*, if not *ad nauseum*. He never wore the tie, but he showed it to me with bursting pride. His greatest delight was composing music of the *ein-zwei-drei* variety that used to be the mainstay of German street bands. When one of his orchestras played these waltzes or operettas, Hammerstein conducted, wearing a frock coat and a seraphic smile. He wrote three one-act comedies in German, and regarded them his most important achievements.

So far as I know, he never had an office, and though he did have a residence in St. Nicholas Avenue, during most of our acquaintance he slept on a canvas cot and worked at a kitchen table in a room he had built for himself above the Victoria. Oscar seemed to spend most of his time in the lobby of this theater, chatting with anyone he liked and turning his back on people who didn't interest him. When my wife and I planned going abroad together, Oscar said, in his thick accent, "All cities are the same brick or stone and mortar. Why travel to see more brick and mortar?" I explained that I travel to see *people*, but Oscar thought, "They are alike, too. Distinctions are not national." He was right in that. There is more difference between two Americans of dissimilar breeding and intelligence than between an American gentleman and a Chinese gentleman.

Oscar's wit was a bit heavy. Once when business was bad and I asked him for free tickets to the Victoria, he asked, "Why do you want a pass? Anybody can get in with a streetcar transfer." On another such melancholy occasion, he exclaimed, "Only two seats! For God's sake, take two rows! We need an audience more than you need entertainment." At these sallies his small black eyes sparkled, though he rarely laughed. He never complained, either. Whatever his ups and downs—and there were many of the latter—Oscar was always a gallant gentleman, taking it, he remarked, "as it comes and goes." It did both rather frequently. Oscar died practically broke, as has almost every other theatrical manager.

The Victoria, opened as a music hall with smoking and drinking permitted, became a vaudeville house—in opposition to the great chains and to the new and magnificent Palace Theater. Since he was an outsider, Hammerstein could present few of the big stars and had to develop his own attractions. In this, my wife-to-be was of invaluable assistance, and many of the most popular features at the Victoria were created by her. One of these was Mrs. Fay, the mind reader and clairvoyant, through whom later I was to gain new understanding of human credulity. Oscar's son "Willie" was the guiding spirit of the Victoria—a dour, silent man with an astonishing capacity for the deepest devotion. Willie adored his Gentile wife, and, at her death, married her sister, stating frankly that he could never love again but required someone to bring up his children. He did not long survive their mother, and one of the

children was Oscar Hammerstein II, now among the most successful of our librettists.

If there was an office at the Victoria, I do not recall it. All business seemed to be transacted in the lobby, which also became a social rendezvous. When Oscar opened his famous roof garden, which subsequently spread to the top of the adjoining Republic Theater where there was a miniature farm with a cow, both business and social contacts were made there. The Ten O'clock Club, an informal organization of theatrical reporters who met at that hour every night to exchange news, spent most of its time on the roof, and included several men who afterward became well known: Thomas S. Jones—"Tommy" to us—the poet, and Walter Prichard Eaton, now head of the school of theater arts at Yale. Most of us dined then at a cheap French restaurant called the *Maison Favre*, back of the Metropolitan Opera House, on Seventh Avenue, and frequented by the opera stars. The food and wine were good, and the place had color and atmosphere. It was there that Miss Marble and I began a lifelong friendship with Carl Van Vechten, the music critic and novelist. Also, we saw much of James Huneker, the greatest figure in criticism in this country.

The most wistful person at the Victoria was a dark, heavily built young Russian Jew, who, in favor one day and out the next, grateful for crumbs of kindness and forever licking the hand that chastised him, developed a tenacity at once provoking and admirable. Then only twenty-three years old, this youth, born in Vilna, had been a newsboy, a bootblack, and valet for the comedian, Dan Daly, before he became a sidewalk speculator in theater tickets. Willie Hammerstein didn't like speculators and was continually throwing this one out of the place. Whenever business was bad or he needed ready money, Oscar would invite him back. The poor fellow turned for sympathy and a smile or a pleasant word to anyone who offered it—chiefly Miss Marble and me. His name was Morris Gest, and he lived to produce more than fifty plays, among them Max Reinhardt's poetic spectacle, *The Miracle*, on which, when the curtain rose, Gest had invested \$610,000. He introduced Eleonora Duse to America, as also the Imperial Russian Ballet, Balieff's *Chauve-Souris* and the Moscow Art Theater. *The Miracle* ruined him, and in his later days Morris wandered about rather

aimlessly, and, as of old, hungry for companionship. A few days before his death, May 16, 1942, I met him in the office of Dr. George Colby, the throat specialist, where he spoke to me of his social standing in Russia, and his graduation from a university there. Of course he knew I knew the truth as to this, but human nature is pitiful and wonderful. Though it was unnecessary, Morris might have reminded me of the triumphs he had achieved for himself—of the fact that he had the soul of an artist and a loyal heart—but, at the end, these things seemed to him less important than advantages of birth and breeding he had never had.

My wooing began to recall a story I'd heard of a man who was engaged to be married so long that he dreaded changing this pleasant state of affairs at the altar. I dreamed rather than dreaded. I was still in debt, and still determined to be free of it, and to have a nest egg and a home. What would have been the use of a home *then*, for two people who went to their offices before nine in the morning and returned after midnight? Among my reactionary ideas has always been the old-fashioned notion that a man shouldn't take a wife until he can support her. When I had met the last of my obligations, earned enough to provide for two families, and could retire a spouse into comfort and security, we would assume double harness. That, we told each other, shouldn't be long now. In the meantime both of us worked fifteen or sixteen hours a day, lived austere, and struggled for solvency. My every check or salary was divided into two parts, one for current obligations and one for the future. Jack Morris made the division automatically, depositing half my earnings in savings banks and the other half in a drawing account. In good years or bad my wife and I have never spent more than 75 per cent of our income. That and the rule that bills must be paid the day they are rendered have become immutable law for us.

About this time a very thin, very pale, very sandy-haired young man came to me with a play I was to read for the Shuberts. I could never dissociate him from a current comic strip called "Johnnie Bostonbeans," as Oscar Hammerstein's plug hat still recalls that of one of the pair in another cartoon, Alphonse and Gaston. Neither will draw a picture for any but my oldest readers. The boy with



the manuscript had a protuberant forehead that suggested scholarship, and had just been graduated from the University of Michigan. His name was Avery Hopwood, and his play, *Clothes*, though not quite professional, was so full of promise that I recommended production. The Shuberts declined it, nevertheless, and early in 1906 another theatrical firm, Wagenhals and Kemper, phoned to ask whether I would consider rewriting it. I agreed on condition that I should share equally in the royalties and in credit for authorship, and that Hopwood should assent to the whole arrangement. I was assured that he had done so, and throughout that spring all my Sundays were devoted to this piece. Avery had written a crisp, witty satire on the society of our day, with touches of excellent melodrama, and I believed care in revision might give us a noteworthy success.

In midsummer 1906 I took ten days from my office to produce this comedy for a tryout by the Brown-Baker Stock Company at the Davidson Theater, Milwaukee. As the second or third rehearsal was ending, I saw someone sitting alone at the back of the dark auditorium and sent the stage manager to ask his business. The intruder proved to be Hopwood, and he had never been told that I was altering his manuscript. "It's not the same play," he said, "and I can hardly believe it could be so improved." That was the beginning of a close friendship. Most tyros at authorship feel that the removal of a comma from their work is vandalism. Avery and I took adjoining rooms at the Pfister Hotel, laughing because the furniture was covered with painted cupids, and collaborated to such advantage that the first performance assured us of a hit.

A week later William A. Brady bought a controlling interest in the production in order to use it as a vehicle for Grace George. Colin Kemper was to direct rehearsals. Early in August Miss Marble left for a vacation in Canada, where she visited our friends the Victor Rosses. Victor had been a reporter for the *Toronto Globe*, and press agent of the Princess Theater. Seriously injured in an automobile accident later, in the hospital he met an executive of Imperial Oil, through whom Victor became a director in that company. He was never able to walk again without crutches, but he died a rich man, uncomplaining, though he must have felt he had paid high for prosperity.

Busy as I was, I felt lost without Miss Marble. I had grown accustomed to seeing her every evening, and this new separation was trying. Late in the afternoon of August 7 I dropped into the Victoria, where Vesta Victoria was singing her famous song, "Here am I a-waiting at the church," and thought it very empty without the plainly dressed little person I was in the habit of seeing there. Miss Marble often wore a gray tweed suit; that was why I had called my earlier play *The Little Gray Lady*. In nearly all my thirty-one plays, the heroine was named Anna, after Miss Marble, and most of them used a few strains of a ballad we loved, "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms."

That particular evening I dined with Henry Mencken, and, of course, talked chiefly of my loneliness. Finally Menck said, "Why don't you marry the girl?"

I told him I felt we should wait for financial security.

"Don't be a damned fool!" Mencken blurted. "You're wasting your best years—and a lot more than that. You're wasting the struggle together that is the real joy, and the real cement of matrimony. That's the tie that binds—recollection of fighting side by side. Come on; we'll send her a telegram."

Mencken actually wrote the message: "IF I COME TO TORONTO WILL YOU MARRY ME THURSDAY?"

Miss Marble replied, "HERE AM I A-WAITING AT THE CHURCH."

Mencken went back to Baltimore, and I worked like a galley slave Wednesday, preparing for another week away from my desk. That evening I dined with the Will Irwins, leaving early to catch the night train for Toronto. As I departed, I told them the reason, and Inez rushed for a pair of new silk stockings I was to take with me as her present to the bride. Ten years in the theater did not prevent my wondering whether they were a proper gift to be brought by a bridegroom.

Except for the stop at the Irwins I had gone to Toronto straight from my office, and the Rosses were shocked at seeing me in a shirt covered with small printed horseshoes. "You can't be married in that," Victor said, so I wore one of his. Victor went with me to get the license, and then insisted I must purchase gifts for the bride and the matron of honor, his wife, Addie Ross. I hadn't counted on that, and the trinkets left me with just enough money

to pay the clergyman. Victor kept telling me of expensive plans he had made. There was to be a wedding breakfast at the King Edward Hotel, and that night we were to board a steamer for Montreal. I didn't want to confess I hadn't the means, and was relieved, later, at bumping into Willard Coxey, press agent for Barnum and Bailey's Circus, who cashed my check for \$100. My only worry then was that I hadn't \$100 in the bank.

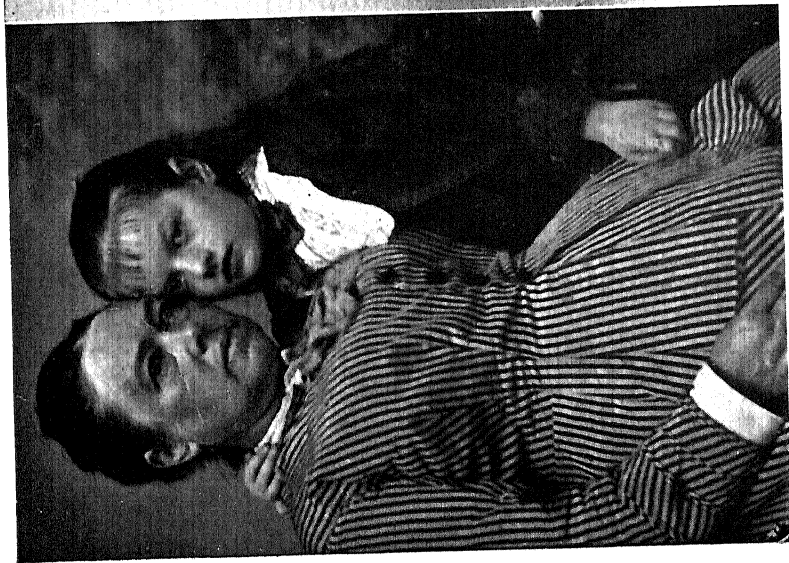
We were married August 9, and I never knew why we chose the First Congregational Church. Twenty years later a young pastor on Long Island wrote me a two-page letter about one of my plays and added a postscript: "It may interest you to know that as a small boy I hid behind the organ in my father's church in Toronto to hear him read the wedding service for you and Mrs. Pollock." Our breakfast was attended by Hector Charlesworth, a newspaper friend, and Mrs. Charlesworth, who threw her baby's shoe into our carriage as we drove away. Of course I still have that shoe.

Somewhere—I think it was at Clayton—I left our steamer to send telegrams to my mother and the Shuberts. This latter read: "Please deposit \$100 my account Mutual Bank tomorrow morning. Urgent." I can recall only one other occasion when I fretted as I did the first night of my honeymoon. How could I deal with the responsibilities I had undertaken? I still owed a little money, though very little, and I had a family of three on Seventh Avenue. Suppose I lost my job? Suppose *Clothes* proved a failure and I never produced another play? It was all very well for Mencken to talk about "fighting side by side," but what of the ammunition? If Menck was so brave about marriage, why didn't *he* marry? Before I fell asleep I had with me a dire picture of my wife, hungry and in rags, scrubbing the floor of a flat for which we couldn't pay the rent, and my contempt for myself was corrosive.

In spite of a reservation we found no rooms at the Windsor Hotel in Montreal and pressed on to Quebec. There the hotels were equally crowded. We drove about town and finally secured a room "with bath." The tub was next to the bed; if one fell out of bed, one took a bath. Our honeymoon was proving a flop when I remembered that my friend, Rennold Wolf, was spending his vacation in the Thousand Islands. Wolf was the first of the current



MY WIFE  
as she looked shortly after our marriage in 1906.



*At left:* Mrs. Pollock at an early age with her beloved nurse Annie. *At right:* My grandmother. "Nearing 70, she embarked upon her first romance."

crop of columnists and the featured writer on the New York *Morning Telegraph*. He secured accommodations for us, and we had a delightful week at Gananoque. By then I had decided that if other men could provide for their wives, I probably could, and would, come hell and high water.

Within a little more than a month I had been away from my office three weeks, producing a play in Milwaukee and acquiring a wife in Toronto, and, returning, I stood dumfounded before my desk. It was literally buried beneath work to be done. Throughout three years I had toiled sixteen hours a day, but now falling out of line had left me so far behind that I could never catch up. I felt the familiar desire to throw up my hands and resign, but what kind of a start was that toward providing for two families? At lunch-time, on Broadway, I met Colin Kemper and asked about rehearsals of *Clothes*. "I'm going to call the whole thing off," he said. "I can't rehearse with my author sitting at a desk in the Lyric Theater. When you decide whether you're going to be a dramatist or a press agent, I'll proceed with your play." I returned to the Lyric and gave up my job.

To say I was panic-stricken is putting it mildly. My wife comforted me with, "We can always live in the Bronx." That is still the consolation she offers when I venture upon something with fear and trembling, and, oddly enough, it has proved effective. In 1916, when I couldn't write plays as fast as failure took their scenery to a storage warehouse, Bob Rubin offered me \$2500 a week to go to Hollywood for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. "Is that the kind of work you think you should be doing?" my wife asked, and when I answered, "No, but we've got to live," she replied, "I'd rather do it on bread and water than see you haul down your flag. We can always move to the Bronx." No one I know in the Bronx gets along without income, but somehow I have been persuaded that, when ours stops, we can still be sustained abundantly on the north side of the Harlem River.

Bereft of my salary envelope, I had one anchor to windward—my position with *Ainslee's Magazine*. That paid \$75 a month, but I had been promised \$100 if and when I made good. I reminded Street and Smith, who replied that my work hadn't been satisfac-

tory and I'd have to struggle along without a raise. This wasn't cricket, as my criticisms in *Ainslee's* had been conspicuously successful, so I resigned that job, too. All my eggs were in one basket now, and I hadn't much faith in the handle. At a loose end, I devoted my days to rehearsals of *Clothes* and most of my nights to writing articles for other magazines. The first of these brought a check for \$400—four weeks' salary—from the *Saturday Evening Post*. Later I asked George Horace Lorimer why he paid so much more than he must have known a beginner would expect. "I always do that," Lorimer said, "with men who show promise. Then when they turn out anything good they send it to us. There's no cheaper way of buying options." These were the words of a great editor. The *Saturday Evening Post* is still doing business at the old stand, while *Ainslee's* is gone and forgotten.

*Clothes* had the advantage of skillful direction and a capital cast. Besides Miss George the company included Robert Haines, Frank Worthing, one of our finest actors; Jennie Eustace, an equally fine actress; Louise Closser, Ann Sutherland, Diana Huneker and Douglas Fairbanks. This was Doug's second part in a play of mine. Diana was the sister of James Huneker; she had won reputation on a newspaper in Philadelphia, and this was her first role. On a hot night in August 1906 *Clothes* scored a substantial hit, and for the time being, at least, we were saved from the Bronx. There must be members of that audience at the Manhattan Theater who still remember the occasion chiefly because of a ludicrous incident. In response to cries of "Author!" Hopwood and I were persuaded to go on the stage. That was customary then, but I always regarded it as ill-advised and authors' first-night speeches as dangerous in the extreme. Anything you said could be used against you. Hopwood and I had been sitting in the orchestra and sweating. Our evening dress was so wrinkled that the trousers ended a foot above our ankles. Each of us carried a straw hat, and as we advanced to the footlights side by side, I became alarmingly certain that Hopwood intended making a few remarks. That might be fatal. With one arm I swept Avery behind me, and the descending curtain obliterated him. To the date of his death, in 1928, Avery told that story to advantage. Meantime he had become a world figure, and earned a larger income, I think, than any other author in our theater. His long list of successes in-

cluded *Seven Days* and *The Bat* (both written with Mary Roberts Rinehart), *Nobody's Widow* and *Fair and Warmer*, and, as so many others have been, he was killed by his own success. Of which more later.

Although *Clothes* was supplying us bountifully, my wife refused to leave the Hammersteins. We had better make hay while the sun shone, she thought; in the theater it was an undependable orb. Moreover, Oscar was building the Manhattan Opera House, in West Thirty-fourth Street, and wanted Miss Marble—as she was still called—to conduct his campaign in rivalry with the Metropolitan. “I shouldn’t see much of you, anyway,” she told me, and that was true. I hadn’t got over my fright at finding myself without wages, and I had worked too hard to find pleasure in even comparative idleness. A man who has no other master must learn to be his own, and I set up a time clock in my brain that I still punch as though it hung in a factory and my job depended upon it. From then until now, I have gone to my desk every morning at eight, and felt miserably ashamed if I was five minutes late. I write until mid-afternoon, devoting the rest of the day to business, correspondence, reading and exercise. I write whether I “feel like it” or not, and no mere headache or other distraction has ever intervened. I had rather write and throw the result in the waste basket than break my habit, and as the habit became fixed, less and less manuscript has met this fate. After many years I gave up the typewriter in favor of a pencil, so that I could compose in trains, planes or hotels, though I still copy my own manuscripts for the sake of revision. I wrote from eight until lunchtime the day after my mother’s death, and probably shall do so the day of my own.

Since we had no time for housekeeping, my new wife and I had rented two rooms in an inexpensive hotel—the St. Francis, at 124 West Forty-seventh Street. It still stands there, a cheap lodging house now. Our rooms cost us \$100 a month, and we ate in modest restaurants. I had devoted part of the preceding year to working with Robert Loraine on the abbreviated version of George Bernard Shaw’s *Man and Superman*, in which Bob was to win his greatest success. *Man and Superman* would have required four or five hours for performance—chiefly because of an interminable scene laid in hell. When we cabled Shaw for instructions as to



making the play presentable, he answered, "Cut hell out of it." That done, and *Clothes*, I now turned to the dramatization of a novel called *The Secret Orchard*, by Agnes and Egerton Castle. Their own adaptation had failed in London, but the story appealed to me and I was confident of improving it. My wife and I still talked of a home by the sea. Meanwhile, we were setting aside 10 per cent of our earnings for her first trip abroad. When that was over, and *The Secret Orchard* had established me as an author, and Hammerstein no longer needed my spouse at the Manhattan, we would move to the country and our own hearth. My wife had already bought andirons in Boston, and I had picked up a desk.

Excepting ourselves, only three of the dwellers in the St. Francis had any connection with the theater. The first of these was J. W. Jacobs, general manager for the Shuberts. The second was a chorus girl named Texas Guinan, who afterward became celebrated as an operator of night clubs. The third was a tall, loose-jointed, gray-eyed and smiling young man fresh from a ranch in Oklahoma. He was Will Rogers, and he was paying off a mortgage on his place by performing feats with a lariat in the vaudeville bill at the Victoria. Will made his entrance on horseback, chewing gum and twirling his rope, with which he did the things you have seen done at rodeos and Wild West Shows. There was nothing remarkable about the act except Will's personality. It would be useless and impossible for me to write about that—useless because so many of you experienced its charm, and impossible because personality cannot be described or explained. Like a vermiform appendix, you have it or you haven't, and, if you haven't, there's nothing much to be done.

Though I was no longer employed in the theater, I went to one every night—partly because I had made new agreements to write criticism—and shortly after eleven o'clock, Joe and Tex and Will and I used to gather in the lobby of the St. Francis. My wife never joined us, being then and now the reverse of gregarious—but the family average is still good! This lobby was not more than ten feet square, and furnished with one chair and one bench. Only people who know the theater could be made to understand why we sat there uncomfortably night after night, talking shop in general and

about ourselves in particular. None of the others drank alcoholic beverages, and none of us cared for late suppers—which eliminated the customary resorts. Tex and I were great chatterboxes; Joe and Will said little, but Will's little was always humorous and to the point. Many sentences afterward famous he extemporized on these nights, and my notes of at least three of them were given Will years later, when he could use them. One of these was his "We're all ignorant, only on different subjects"—as terse and amusing a statement of fact as Oscar Wilde's characterization, "He hasn't an enemy in the world, but none of his friends likes him."

It was my wife, witnessing Rogers' performance twice a day, who first suggested, "If he's so witty, why doesn't he put some of it into the act?" I passed on the suggestion, and it must have registered, since not more than a week later Will joined us, beaming, and said, "I tried a gag when I came on tonight, and they laughed. I'm going to keep it in the act." As he added gags and laughs, he subtracted from the number of rope tricks, devoting many minutes to each while he chewed gum and uttered laconic wisdom. The horse was given up altogether. By the end of his long engagement at the Victoria Rogers' turn was three-fourths monologue, and his salary had doubled. Within a few years he was writing the most widely syndicated column in America and receiving as much as \$1,000 for an after-luncheon or after-dinner speech. Always he remained an unassuming, whimsical sage, innocent of book-learning but rich in common sense.

There are two large rooms on the eighth floor of the Astor Hotel that are rented for meetings and banquets. One afternoon when I was to speak in the north room, I wandered to that on the south and found Rogers sitting alone outside it. "What are you doing here?" I asked.

Will looked up with an expression of amused disdain. "I'm talking for a corset-makers' convention," he said. "Me that don't know a dame that wears even a brasserie—if you know what I mean."

Will's shining qualities were all-embracing tolerance and kindness. He was generous with money, but always even more ready with a smile and a hearty word or a bit of advice. Returning from a journey in 1935, I sauntered into the barber shop at the Astor

and found an atmosphere of deep gloom. Several of the manicure girls were in tears. "What's the matter?" I inquired. "Not going out of business, are you?"

One of the girls answered, "Haven't you heard? Will Rogers is dead."

It seems to me no one could have a more eloquent tribute.

By the spring of 1907 I had finished *The Secret Orchard* and sold it to the Shuberts. Also, I had settled the last of my obligations, the 10 per cent of our income set aside for travel amounted to more than \$1,000, and the International Newspaper Syndicate, for which I wrote a weekly review of plays, jumped at the suggestion that I cover entertainments in Europe and North Africa. Accordingly, my wife and I were ready for our second honeymoon. Paying the same price for passage I had paid on my last previous voyage—\$42.50 each—we sailed from Philadelphia on the American Liner *Friesland*, in company with Carl Van Vechten, then a youth of my own age, which was twenty-seven, and Mr. and Mrs. Paul Thompson. Mrs. Paul was a sister of Inez Haynes Irwin, and Paul, a former reporter, hoped to supply the press with photographs of news events all over the world. On this trip, therefore, he was to travel with us, combining business with pleasure. "Paul Thompson Photos" later became first in their field, after which Paul took to drink, lost his business and his family, and recently died at rock-bottom in California.

My wife still insists that I mapped our itinerary under the impression that I was booking one-night stands. Actually, I wanted a sort of bird's eye view of two continents, and planned to return later for longer stays in places we found interesting. Certainly no pair of tourists before or since surpassed our speed and industry. After a fortnight in London during which I saw twenty plays, we hopped, skipped and jumped through Belgium, Holland, Germany and Austria to Italy, whence we expected to go to Morocco, and home via Marseilles and Paris. At Rome we learned there was fighting in North Africa, so that was out. My wife came down with fever and we lost ten days in Rome. All this, with the rate at which we traveled, prevented my keeping my agreement with the International Syndicate. For the first, and I hope the last time in my life, I "fell down on the job," and from the day we left London sent no word to my editors in New York.

Our funds ran low, too, and at last we found ourselves with exactly \$104, railway tickets to Paris, and steamship tickets for a vessel sailing three weeks later from Havre. At Monte Carlo, in a cheap hotel room containing a printed notice that ruined gamblers must not commit suicide on the premises, my wife and I discussed the situation. What was the good of three weeks in Paris with \$104? I suggested, instead, that we play roulette; if we lost the money, we could exchange our reservations for others on a ship sailing immediately, and, if we won, we could finish our trip in a blaze of glory. My wife was game. I gave her half of our capital, kept the other half, and we made for the Casino.

I was detained at the door because I wasn't wearing evening clothes, and when finally I got in, I found a desolate spouse who had lost her \$50 and wanted to quit. I explained that if \$104 had seemed inadequate, the remaining \$54 was doubly so, and that we must lose all or win something. I had never seen a roulette wheel before, and didn't know how to divide the risk by playing on the line—if that is the right expression. Therefore, I laid chips representing half my capital exactly in the center of the square numbered 17, the croupier spun the wheel—and the ball dropped into 17! The cashier handed us \$800 and, scared to death that we might be tempted to play again and lose, we were out of that Casino a minute and a half later. I have gambled only once since—again at Monte Carlo, in 1921, when, for not-too-expensive amusement, I laid five francs on 17 at every turn of the wheel from nine o'clock until eleven—and never won once!

We had a grand fortnight in Paris, at the end of which, reading English newspapers while my wife transacted some business in a bank, I discovered that my play *In the Bishop's Carriage* was to open the next night in London. I hadn't known of this, and we decided to be present. Reaching London about eight o'clock, we went straight to the Waldorf Theater and missed the first act because the house was sold out and I couldn't convince anyone that I was the author of the play. Fannie Ward and Charles Cartwright were excellent as Nance Olden and Tom Dorgan, and I received a cable from Clyde Fitch congratulating me upon becoming "an international author."

Returning to the Strand Hotel, where we had stayed two months before, I found nine other cables bearing various dates.

Eight of them were from the International Syndicate, and all eight, though worded differently, said, "You're fired." My dereliction had cost me a \$75-a-month job. The ninth wire was from my friend, Charles Hanson Towne, then editor of the *Smart Set*, offering me \$100 a month to write criticisms for that magazine. I should be a better man, perhaps, were I not so rarely punished for my misdeeds. There may be truth, however, in a sentence I had just written in *The Secret Orchard*: "God help us if we are to be punished *for* our sins as we are punished *by* them." A lifetime afterward, I am still unable to recall my behavior to the International Syndicate without wonder at myself, and the feeling that, somehow, Charlie Towne's offer was an immoral act.

ROULETTE

NOT long ago my daughter gave me a screen for my study that affords a long vista of my past. Lot's wife proved that it is a mistake to look back, and I have always believed that when a man does so it is because he has ceased to go forward. Every night writes finis to a chapter, and every morning begins a fresh one. Repeatedly, I have forgotten a failure before the scenery was out of the theater, and found myself planning a new play. Writing reminiscences is another matter, and at the beginning of the task I learned that this screen is a record.

It stands before a row of filing cabinets in my work-room in the country and is covered with souvenirs. There is an ace of hearts that I once cut out of a playing card with a rifle at fifty yards, and the waiting-at-the-church telegram, and dozens of letters from and pictures of former associates. More important still, there are the original programs of all my plays in all the languages in which they have been acted, and flashlight photographs of scenes from them. I discover that looking at each of these brings a train of memories and reflections. Before this, they have often prompted interesting comment. Shortly after Hitler took over Austria, Lili Darvas, the Hungarian actress and wife of the dramatist Ferenc Molnar, glancing at the cast of a piece of mine presented in Vienna in 1923, remarked, "Three of the eleven people in that company have killed themselves within the past year!"

Contemplating the screen now, I recall the circumstances and methods of earlier work, and wonder which have been improved and where I slipped back. None of my first plays required more than twenty days for writing; several of them were written in

four days. My dramatization of *The Secret Orchard* occupied four months, few of my subsequent dramatic works were finished in less than six, and at least three of them took a year each. I have never shared Pinero's satisfaction with "a day's work consisting of one good sentence," but my average is little more than a thousand words in a morning. They are better words, I think, representing a greater amount of thought and care in putting them together, but does that account for the slowing-up? I am rather of the opinion that an author is like the centipede that had no trouble in walking until it asked itself which foot it used first. One ceases to write rapidly when one realizes the difficulty of writing *well*, and how well it *can* be done. Once I asked John Galsworthy whether he continued to read Dickens. "No," he answered; "it's too damned humiliating." When one is acquainted with the work of the masters, one approaches one's own work with respect—and caution.

Not that too great pains can't ruin writing—or, perhaps, any other job. In polishing endlessly one may obliterate the grain of the wood, its original strength and character. Of some ancient race it was said that they considered questions of state twice: Once when drunk, for enthusiasm, and again when sober, for reflection. This seems to me the best of all possible methods. I have completed an entire act at a sitting, choked with emotion, and then found the stuff maudlin, but containing a degree of basic feeling it couldn't have had otherwise. No scene that moved me as I wrote it ever failed to move an audience, and no scene that failed to move me was ever successful in the theater. The same thing is true of a magazine article or a speech. The quality I think most important in writing is the human quality—sympathy, what Kipling called "the common touch"—though it has never been popular with critics. Perhaps that is why their verdicts are so often reversed by posterity. Simplicity is a fine quality, too. In my boyhood, I saw a lamp that had stood on Goethe's desk and to which the great German had fixed a placard on which he had written, as a constant reminder to himself, "Be simple." I thought *then*, "If that was good enough for Goethe, it's good enough for me." Many of our recent affectations in writing are designed to conceal a lack of ideas. A man who has anything to say says it as simply as possible;

the man who hasn't throws out a smoke screen of "style." The best "style" is that of which the writer, *and* the reader, are completely unconscious.

I didn't intend an essay on literary art, so that's that. Since this is an autobiography, however, I may mention that I *never* deal with anything I haven't experienced, with people or places that I don't know at first hand. During my apprenticeship I was always locating my stories in exotic surroundings. Later I learned to find them in the flat across the way, or, at farthest, around the corner. Also, I learned to keep my eyes and the pores of my heart open. I had sooner go out without my trousers than without my notebook. These books are crowded with descriptions of people and places, bits of dialogue, minor incidents, and what not. When I get a theme for a story or play or lecture, I summarize it on the label of a folder, and then everything that has to do with the subject goes into that folder. It becomes a sort of sticky flypaper. There are more than three thousand of these folders in my files; some of them have been there many years. One day I think I'd like to write a piece about—let us say—courage, and then I empty that folder, glance through its contents, put them aside, and use what has clung to my mind. In a closet in Charles Frohman's rooms in London, I once saw a tall pile of manuscripts that had been submitted to him. I asked how he decided which to read next. "I find," he answered, "that the best plays rise to the surface"—and I find the same thing true of ideas.

After the production of *The Pit*, I was at my wits' end for another play. I have told you all there is to tell of *A Game of Hearts* and of *The Great Adventurer*, a hack job for my friend Thomas E. Shea, who wanted to play Napoleon. He paid me \$2,000 for the manuscript, which had been completed in a trifle more than a week. I never possessed another manuscript, I witnessed but one performance, and this is the only program missing from my screen. So far as I can remember, the play had just one good idea—a device by which bayonets fastened to a broad belt that revolved behind a canvass wall produced the illusion of a passing regiment. Tom called the play *Napoleon, the Great*, and used it, off and on, for many seasons after its premier in 1903. Neither *Napoleon* nor *A Game of Hearts* increased my stature by an inch,



and common sense told me that if I was to take advantage of the success of *The Pit*, I must have another play ready before it was forgotten.

Curiously, *The Little Gray Lady* began with its title. As afore-said, that was suggested by the dress of my wife-to-be. For weeks, I had nothing *but* the title. As many lovers do, I suppose, Miss Marble and I frequently read to each other the sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and in one of them I was struck by the lines:

“ . . . Frequent tears have run  
The colors from my life, and left so dead  
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done  
To give the same as pillow to thy head.”

Later these lines were printed on our program. Maurice Campbell, who produced the piece, insisted that we needed another quotation to explain our hero, who wasn't a hero at all—which wasn't being done in those days. I couldn't recall any such quotation. “Invent one,” Maurice suggested, “and credit it to Arthur Symons, because nobody but his mother ever read Arthur Symons.” I followed instructions, and when the play opened in New York a critic wrote that it was “sufficiently obvious without trotting out that trite quotation from Arthur Symons.”

*The Little Gray Lady* was a tale of life among government clerks in a boardinghouse in Washington—people and an environment as familiar to me as my face. It was, as Arthur Symons had *not* said, the story of “a man made weak by loving, and then strong by being loved.” The conflict was between a plain, sober, worth-while woman, Anna Gray, and an empty beauty named Ruth Jordan, with countless additions of character, atmosphere and incident—an excellent play, if I do say it. Like all *different* plays, it was hard to sell. Any manager will produce an imitation of a success, which, of course, is almost never a success, but few are willing to break ground. Anyway, surveying my screen, I am struck by a curious fact: Every bad play I ever wrote was sold quickly and easily; the good plays, and the successful ones, were disposed of with difficulty. I had begun despairing of the *Gray*

*Lady* when Crosby Gaige, who was secretary to Alice Kauser, my dear friend and agent during most of my career in the theater, appeared with a check for advance royalty and a contract with Campbell. Gaige afterward became a manager himself and produced three of my most notable hits.

Maurice Campbell was the husband of that captivating comedienne, Henrietta Crosman, and later in charge of the enforcement of national prohibition. Also he was one of the best of our stage directors, but won little credit for that, or anything else. I have never understood why Campbell always fell short of the reward for his really considerable ability. He never had any money—least of all, before and after his presentation of *The Little Gray Lady*. We opened in Hartford, because I had grown superstitious about opening in that town in which all my early successes first appeared. Maurice came to my room at Heublein's Hotel late the afternoon of the premiere and asked, "Did you ever act?"

I said, "No."

"That's too bad," Campbell remarked, "because you're going to—tonight." William Humphrey, our "heavy man" or villain, was ill and because of a football game and local affection for our leading woman, Julia Dean, there was nearly \$1600 in the box office. "We've got to give a performance," Maurice ended. "In your wildest dreams, you can't picture me returning \$1600."

"But I *can't* act," I protested.

"Who cares?" said Campbell. "We'll be in Worcester tomorrow."

I yielded. As Maurice reminded me, no one else knew the lines or could learn them in three hours. We felt sure I knew them, but we were wrong. Perhaps stage fright was to blame—and I was scared *plenty*—but when Julia appeared for our first scene together I couldn't remember a word. The whole state of affairs had to be outlined in that scene and, realizing it, I conducted Julia almost down to the footlights and, improvising, told her in half a dozen sentences what had to be told and then led her off the stage. In those few minutes Julia, the darling of Hartford, had reappeared there, been applauded enthusiastically, and then had walked off *without speaking one word*. As we closed the door behind us, Julia spoke four. "You so-and-so!" she exclaimed. No other criti-

cism of my efforts has ever been so direct and vigorous. However, later I pulled myself together, and we got through.

Julia won her spurs in this piece, as did Dorothy Donnelly, who played Ruth Jordan. Dorothy previously had created the title role in Shaw's *Candida*, and later she earned a fortune by writing the libretti of *Blossom Time* and *The Student Prince*. The unheroic hero was acted in Hartford by Edgar Selwyn, to whom I have referred before and shall refer again, but the impression made was not good, and John Albaugh, Jr., had succeeded him when we reached New York. This, I think, was a mistake. Authors and managers make many such, of course. In another of my plays long afterward we paid a charming girl something like \$75 a week in a secondary character, and dropped her before we came to Broadway. The girl's name was Miriam Hopkins, and before long she was earning \$5,000 a week in the movies. That fact doesn't convince me we were wrong, but the girl's performance had qualities we never found again.

*The Little Gray Lady* opened in New York at the Garrick, formerly identified with the famous comedians Harrigan and Hart and later the first home of the Theater Guild, on a dreadful night in January 1906. The audience was cold, wet and uncomfortable, and nothing could make it laugh. Our first act was laid in "The back yard at Mrs. Jordan's." A high wooden fence ran along the left of the stage to a passage at the rear of the house. At the entrance to this alley stood a garbage pail. Sitting alone in the gallery, I had decided that our comedy was a failure, when a cat I had never seen before appeared on the fence, ran along the top of it to the alley, jumped down, nosed off the lid of the garbage pail, and then fled up the passageway. The audience broke into laughter and applause, and we were saved. Afterward we rubbed raw meat on the fence every day, deposited it in the pail, and turned the cat loose at the proper moment. That cat became the real star of the play. She proved to be the property of the stage-door keeper, and I tried to buy her from him when we left the Garrick for another house, but he wouldn't sell.

A hair's breadth may mark the difference between success and failure in the theater, and frequently the reasons for that difference are beyond guessing. No one has ever explained to me, for example,

why *Way Down East* always played to capacity for three days in Minneapolis, and died the death the rest of the week across the river in St. Paul. Later I was summoned to Milwaukee to end the career of a musical comedy of my own that had broken the hearts of its producers, George M. Cohan and Sam Harris. Everyone but George wanted to shut up shop that night. Cohan insisted we play a week that had been booked at his Grand Opera House in Chicago. We played there almost an entire season, and then moved on to even greater prosperity in New York. Frank Curzon, the shrewdest manager I ever knew, once said to me in London: "There is a chemistry involved in first nights that nobody can explain. I have seen many a play succeed on a Monday that, with the same audience, cast and performance, would have failed dismally on Tuesday." This is one of the reasons I insist that theatrical production is no more a business than playing roulette.

*The Little Gray Lady* was a case in point. In spite of a first-night audience that became rapturous; in spite of enthusiastic reviews, and letters, and praise from people whose opinion we valued, we had a short run in New York. Years afterward, Campbell told me, "I was looking over the box-office statements of the *Lady* last night, and concluded that we had a great success and didn't know it." Maurice meant that receipts increased every week. In any event I doubt that he had the means to stick it out, or the enterprise that might have changed the result. The business of obtaining production for a play is no less roulette. Someone has described an author with a manuscript as "a man who doesn't know what he's got, trying to sell it to a man who doesn't know what he wants." After our opening at the Garrick, Charles Frohman, the most important impresario of his time, sent for me, and asked, "Why didn't you let me have *The Little Gray Lady*?"

I replied that he had rejected the play.

"I never saw it," he declared. "Who signed the letter declining the piece?"

Fearing to make trouble for the reader, I insisted that I didn't remember his name.

Frohman laughed. "I couldn't blame him," he said. "At this moment, downstairs there's a matinee performance of a play that may be immortal. It has the advantage of fine acting, lighting, music

and scenery. The audience must be influenced by the knowledge that it is witnessing an enormous success, and yet you would have no difficulty in finding a hundred people in the lobby who would call the show 'rotten.' If there's such a divergence of opinion regarding a play under these conditions, how can one expect infallibility of the man who has seen only a typewritten manuscript?" The performance "downstairs" in the Empire was being given by Maude Adams in *Peter Pan*, and of course Frohman was quite right about it.

Most of the little money earned for me by the *Gray Lady* was paid by James K. Hackett, who sent out a second company starring a former chorus girl named Pauline Frederick. Anna Gray was almost her first role, but she was good in it, and became popular both in the theater and in Hollywood. Jimmie Hackett, an excellent actor himself and a warm friend, could not have been described, however, as a shrinking violet. All his advertising for my play read, "James K. Hackett presents Pauline Frederick in *The Little Gray Lady* by Channing Pollock." Hackett's name appeared in the biggest and boldest type, Miss Frederick's in a smaller variety, and my own was microscopic. One afternoon when Jim and I were sitting together in the rear of a box office, a woman at the window asked, "Is James K. Hackett appearing in this play?"

Reluctantly, because he feared losing his customer, the ticket-seller said, "No." Hackett's chest had swelled almost to the bursting point when the woman remarked, "Then I'll take three seats." Poor Jimmie! He would have been more at home in a milieu where, later, billboards were to announce, "Cecil B. De Mille's *Ten Commandments*."

*In the Bishop's Carriage*, which was written after *The Little Gray Lady* but produced earlier, was an even more conspicuous example of "playing roulette." It began when Roi Cooper Megrue brought Miss Michelson's novel to my office in the Lyric. Roi was then assistant to the dramatists' agent, Elisabeth Marbury, and later he wrote such popular plays as *Under Cover*, *Tea for Three* and *It Pays to Advertise*. Roi said the stage rights in this book had been acquired by George Tyler, head of Liebler and Company, and would I try making a play of it? Of course I would. In those days

for a small down payment I would have tried making a play of Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*. I never read *In the Bishop's Carriage*. I never had time. Besides, I had decided that success in dramatizing a novel depended on not knowing too much about it. If one did, one was likely to use dialogue, incidents and characters that were all right in a hundred-thousand-word book, but out of place in a different form of narration that must be confined within about twenty thousand words. I knew the story of Miss Michelson's romance, and that was enough. When we opened, a critic said I had shown "skill and daring" by making Latimer my hero, instead of Obermuller, who was the hero of the novel. That was my first intimation of the fact.

The *Carriage* was tried out during the summer of 1905 by the Hunter-Bradford-Reid Stock Company at Hartford so prosperously that this organization also presented the play in Worcester and Springfield. Julia Dean was Nance Olden and gave a magnificent performance. George Tyler stunned me by insisting that we must get someone else for the role. Nance was the first "crook" to be the principal character in a piece, and George argued that audiences could sympathize with her only if she were played by a girl so young that we could believe "she didn't know what she was doing." I thought it more important that Nance be liked for her cleverness, but Tyler was adamant, and I carried the news to Julia. This had been her first opportunity, and she was heart-broken. That was my chief reason for giving her the leading part in my next production, *The Little Gray Lady*.

This company was still acting my melodrama when Charles Cartwright, who afterward played Dorgan in it in London, called at the Lyric to tell me he was rehearsing in another piece that he insisted had been stolen from *In the Bishop's Carriage*. This was *Leah Kleschna*, in which Mrs. Fiske won a great success, and the only likeness between the two plays was that each had a woman thief as its heroine. Worried by Cartwright's report, however, I urged Tyler to "beat Mrs. Fiske to the draw" by bringing the Hunter-Bradford-Reid cast to New York the following Monday. George, who always believed big names to be indispensable in a production and presented more of them than any other manager, looked at me in amazement. "You wouldn't dare open a Broadway

theater," he said, "with that fifty-cent bunch of ham-fatters." Within two or three years, every one of the "fifty-cent bunch" had become a celebrity in our theater. Besides Julia Dean, it included Helen Ware, Edmund Breese, John Westley, Clarence Handyside, John Findlay, Ida Lewis, Blanche Chapman and Marjorie Wood. Of the practically all-star cast with which Tyler presented the piece, only Arthur Byron and Grant Stewart were improvements, and within a few weeks Helen Ware had been asked to resume her original role of Mag Monahan.

The first night at Powers Theater, Chicago, in October 1905 I arrived early and found Tyler in heated argument with Harry Powers. My play, Powers said, contained a word that had never been spoken on his stage, and never would be. The word was "mistress"—which will indicate the change in our "manners and customs." Tom Dorgan told Latimer, "Marry her if you like, but she was my mistress." I changed that to "my girl," and everybody was satisfied. *In the Bishop's Carriage* collapsed in Chicago and was withdrawn. Tyler revived it subsequently, with Jessie Busley, as Nance, giving exactly the kind of performance that had been fatal to poor Julia, and the play earned a large sum. It was one of the few plays to do that without ever reaching New York. *Leah Kleschna* and our all-star cast settled *that*, and though the *Carriage* rolled over the country for years, and was acted abroad, it remains unknown to Broadway—which is just as well.

Still more roulette was played with my dramatization of *The Secret Orchard*, which I had sold to the Shuberts before my departure for Europe. Returning, I learned that they had sold it to Hunter, Bradford and Reid, who now wanted to try their luck in New York. Charles Reid had married a young Hungarian actress, Josephine Victor, who played Joy. The supporting cast was the same stock company that had acted the *Carriage* in Hartford except that it included Katherine Emmett, who afterward made a great hit in *The Children's Hour* and, as I write, has made another in *Guest in the House*. Again as a tryout, the *Orchard* opened in Hartford at the end of July 1907 and showed promise. It was fated, however. Seldom, perhaps, has the little ball seemed so often on the verge of dropping into 17, only to fall to the floor.

Undeterred by the fact that our *Carriage* had behaved like the one-horse shay there, the regular season of *The Secret Orchard* began in Chicago—the week of the financial panic of 1907. Banks were collapsing, no one had any money, and our receipts averaged about \$100 a night. Somehow we survived, and the Shuberts sent us on a tour of one-night stands, and what should have been half-night stands, in remote corners of backward states. Hunter, Bradford and Reid were approaching bankruptcy when, by some accident, we wandered into Philadelphia, and played for three weeks to the absolute capacity of the theater. Henry Miller, the great star and stage director who was the father of Gilbert Miller, now among our foremost managers, witnessed the play in Philadelphia and was much struck by it. "I'd like to redirect the company," he said.

I replied that we couldn't afford it.

"I'm not suggesting that I be paid," Miller explained. "All I want is to increase the chances of a fine play."

For more than a fortnight Miller made a diurnal round trip between New York and Philadelphia, refusing to accept even his railway fare. Rehearsing six hours a day, he did such a masterly job that when he got through even the Shuberts thought we should go straight to Broadway. Henry had substituted Aubrey Boucicault, a son of the famous Dion Boucicault, for Vincent Serrano in the role of the Duke of Cluny, and the day before our metropolitan premiere Boucicault lost his memory and had to be replaced by William Courtenay, who learned a part almost as long as Hamlet in eighteen hours. *The Secret Orchard* required a small and intimate theater and landed in the Lyric, which has one of the largest auditoriums in New York. Nevertheless, the *Orchard* won an ovation, and the most glowing criticisms I have ever achieved. The next morning we learned that Mrs. Fiske held a contract for the Lyric, and we must get out at the end of two weeks.

Wagenhals and Kemper came to the rescue with their Astor Theater, but before it became available we had to mark time for another fortnight on the road. When we returned interest in the play had lapsed. Our last performance in the Lyric had drawn over \$1900; our first at the Astor drew less than \$300. Wagenhals and Kemper couldn't decide upon a succeeding attraction. They



had produced two failures out of town, and the scenery of both was in storage. One of the pair must be used as a stopgap for the Astor—but which? The two managers argued so long that at last I suggested, “Why don’t you flip a coin?” They agreed, and Kemper’s favorite won. It was Eugene Walter’s *Paid in Full*, and it made the fortune of the firm. Wagenhals’ favorite, *The Builders*, brought to town later, survived only a few weeks. To the end of their lives both men pointed to the choice of the Walter play as indisputable evidence of their discernment and enterprise.

Meanwhile, Hunter, Bradford and Reid were broke. I shall never forget standing on the stage of the Astor after our last performance with a company that hadn’t received a penny for that week’s work, when men began hauling in scenery on the back of which was stenciled PAID IN FULL. Everyone laughed, of course. I was almost as broke as my managers, and very dubious as to my future. I could get back my job with the Shuberts, I thought, but my wife reminded me that “we can always live in the Bronx.” From that fate, we were saved again by my dramatization of Thomas Dixon’s *The Traitor*, a sequel to *The Clansman*, which had provoked riots everywhere and afterward became the epochal movie *The Birth of a Nation*. I don’t want to boast, but I doubt that anyone else ever wrote a play as bad as *The Traitor*. A merciful providence and a wise management kept the piece out of New York, but it did very well on the reputation of *The Clansman* in the South, and tided me over what otherwise would have been a lean winter.

On that last night of *The Secret Orchard* I had bumped into Charles Frohman, who said, “You did a remarkable job with that play, but I can’t understand what interested you in so depressing a subject. I’m sailing for Europe tomorrow, but if you ever get another idea that would make a piece like *The Little Gray Lady*, I’ll produce it.” Before breakfast the next morning I had a scenario of *Such a Little Queen* on his desk, and that night Daniel Frohman handed me one of the few written contracts ever signed by “C. F.” It was on half a sheet of note paper, and read: “I agree to produce your play when we’re both ready, and to pay usual royalties. C. F.” The play was not otherwise described, and the agreement was not

dated. Frohman's word was as good as his bond, and everyone knew it.

I began work on *Such a Little Queen* as soon as money started coming in from *The Traitor*, and completed my comedy the following summer in that long-dreamed-of home by the sea. As to that, you shall learn if you like, in the next chapter. With it, you have my promise that I shall not go into detail with regard to most of my subsequent plays as I have done with those which occupy this installment. Excepting *The Pit*, and one or two negligible efforts, these three were my firstborn, and you know what that means to a parent. Besides, I wanted to give you an idea of the hazards of the profession I abandoned after producing one of my most successful works in 1931. Tomorrow I shall fold the screen in my study and shut out its temptations to live over again every hour of my thirty-five years in the theater. That business, or profession, or what you will, shares another characteristic of gambling: Almost nobody who becomes addicted to it is ever entirely cured, except by death.

Not long ago I spent an afternoon with a former actress who retired after marrying one of the wealthiest men in America. Looking across her expensively furnished rooms, through French windows that separated them from terraces and rolling lawns, I said, "You have everything now—peace, security, leisure, a delightful husband, and one of the most beautiful homes in the world."

"Yes," the lady admitted, "but I'm afraid I'd give it all for a few more of the old days on the stage."

My own wife is the only person I have ever known to escape scot free.

## THE PARSONAGE

SOME time before we were married, my wife returned from a tour in Pennsylvania raving over a house she had seen there. It had been built next to the theater for the use of the local manager, and was of brick, with an uncovered door in its center and five little windows set in its roof. "What do they call a house like that?" I asked, meaning was it Georgian or Colonial.

Quite seriously, Miss Marble answered, "I suppose they call it The Parsonage."

For the moment she had confused a minister's house, next the church, with a manager's, next the theater. Both of us laughed, and I said, "When we have a home, we'll call it The Parsonage." We did, too, and for many years the words appeared on a sign at the entrance, and on our letter paper, leading to amusing confusions, and some not so amusing. One morning when my wife was in town and I sat alone at a typewriter in our front room, a pretty country girl stepped up to the open window, and remarked, "I'd like you to marry me."

I suppose I replied, "This is so sudden."

An instant later her swain joined her, and I learned they had seen the sign beside our steps, decided that I was a clergyman, and elected me to perform the desired ceremony. Much of my mail was addressed to "Rev. Channing Pollock," and my wife insisted that what came to be a rather general and damaging idea of me as a pious gray-beard, opposed to all pleasures of the flesh, and given to exclaiming, "Oh, sugar!" when vexed, originated in the legend at the top of our stationery. Sentimentally, however, we continued

calling our little house The Parsonage until a tragic accident, some years afterward.

It was because we had been such wanderers, I suppose, that we so longed for a home. We felt, too, as millions of others have done, that with a roof-tree of our own we could always manage the other necessities. Finally we wanted peace and a degree of solitude in which to do good work—"a place to live and love in for a day, with darkness and the death-hour 'rounding it." As I have said, I wanted salt water, too, and was determined that our land should be close to it. Again like those millions, I have always found calm and solace in the sea. When the small worries of every day intrude, I can look at the waves spilling themselves on a beach, and in the reflection that they did so thousands of centuries before I was born and will go on thousands of centuries after my departure, I find a true measure of the importance of a disagreeable letter or a disheartening failure.

Unfortunately for us, shore front was prohibitively expensive in the vicinity of New York. We answered advertisements and became the white hopes of dozens of suburban real-estate dealers, but to no avail. One Sunday with a school-friend of my wife's we went to Rye Beach to inspect a residence that promised to be within our means. I wanted to buy it, as I wanted to buy anything within sight of the ocean, but my wife demurred because the house had no bathroom. I regarded her as far too fastidious. The school-friend laughed, and the following week as a joke sent us a newspaper advertisement of homes by the sea in which big type announced, "Bath Rooms with Modern Plumbing." We were amused, but I telephoned the agent and the next Sunday he took us under his wing and to the far reaches of Long Island.

Excepting its population, very few people realize how long Long Island is. To this day, business associates phone me from New York and propose running out to us for a few minutes' conversation. Before this particular expedition to Shoreham my wife and I had gone to spend a week end near Northport with Jane Cowl, who was a very young girl then and had just married Adolph Klauber, drama critic of the *New York Times*. After the first hour in a rickety day coach, we had decided that Northport must be in the not so Near East—but Northport is scarcely more

than half the distance to Shoreham! And no one without the experience could possibly imagine the twentieth century retaining such an anachronism as the Long Island Railway. Now it has had thirty-four years to grow dirtier, but is unchanged in all other respects. There is—or was—a more primitive train between Madrid and Granada, in Spain, and when I discovered that, I promptly announced the fact by cable to the president of the Long Island, but without visible effect.

That Sunday in 1908 we were two and a half hours covering the sixty miles to Port Jefferson, and then learned that the train went no farther. Our real-estate agent looked us over to decide whether we were worth the risk of the five dollars it would cost to hire a horse and buggy. I must have had on the better of my two business suits, or my wife must have impressed him, because about three in the afternoon, almost a whole day after leaving New York, we reached Shoreham.

I thought then and still think it is the most beautiful spot in the world. The only possible rival I ever saw is on the Bay of Tunis in North Africa. Scores of visitors have remarked the likeness of our coast to that of the Riviera. We are halfway down the Island, on the North Shore, directly across the Sound from New Haven, which is about the distance from Dover to Calais. Only in exceptionally clear weather can the opposite shore be seen. On our side sand dunes rise sixty or seventy feet straight from the ten or twelve miles of white, curving beach between two headlands. The property back of this had been woodland, and we are in the midst of bearing fruit trees and of a veritable forest of pine and spruce. Five minutes after I first laid eyes on the place I knew we were going to live and die there—if it didn't cost too much. "Too much," I decided, meant more than we could beg, borrow or steal.

There were only five or six houses in Shoreham—one of them a brick dwelling that had been built by Nikola Tesla, who constructed an immense steel tower near by from which he conducted early experiments in wireless telegraphy. Later Lee de Forest used both house and tower. The other dwellings were flimsy structures thrown together for quick sale. All of them were in the hills, half a mile from the sea, because the real-estate operator hoped to dispose of this property first, knowing that the shore front would

be easily marketed. These hills are in the shape of an amphitheater, and the agent pointed out that "you can see the water from any of them."

"I can *see* the water from the roof of my hotel in New York," I said. "I want to live where I can fall into it."

Reluctantly the agent took us to a half-acre of sand and beach grass on the edge of the cliff. That plot would be \$2,000. We bought it next morning. At the same time we contracted with the operator to erect for us what only youth and enthusiasm could have described as a house. It was to contain five rooms, standing on locust posts, without any other foundation, and to be constructed of sheathing and shingles. When we first saw the building in the course of completion, it was literally covered with lettering that read "R. H. Macy & Co." "It pays to advertise," we thought, and then discovered that the house of our dreams had been built of the packing crates in which the shop sent out our furniture.

Were we downhearted? No. This sheathing was to be covered with shingles—so what? We stood on another sand dune, looking at our own home, less than a month from the day we had signed the agreement for it. My first impression was that someone had painted the cottage on a backdrop. Nobody, we believed, could put up a dwelling in that time. It was solid enough—if you didn't lean against it too hard; a box of a place, with soft pine floors and trim, cheap plumbing and cheaper hardware. The price was to be \$2,200, half carried on a mortgage. My bride and I stared at the nearly finished job, and, with one accord, decided the mortgage was "out." The home couldn't be ours while we were in debt for it. Our real-estate operator gave us \$200 off for cash, and, rapturously, we moved in on June 3, six weeks to the day from the Sunday we had entered Eden.

It was at least six weeks more before we could believe we owned the place. We used to look at the faucets in the kitchen, and say, "Well, *those* belong to us, anyway." To be the proprietors of a kitchen sink seemed not too impossible, but a whole house—we were still dreaming! Besides the kitchen we had a dining room about ten feet square, a pantry, a large living room, two bedrooms, *and a bath!* The rooms were rough-plastered, with a simple but effective design made by drawing a broom over the plaster while

it was wet, and there was a huge rubblestone fireplace that is still our pride and comfort. Our roof didn't leak until almost a year after it was put on. My wife did the cooking—and how! I have had the good fortune to be connected by blood or marriage with two great cooks, my grandmother and my wife. I shouldn't dare write that if my mother were still alive. In her last year mother would still prepare special dishes for me on her tiny electric stove and flush with pleasure if—and when—I said, "That's better than Anna can make." I feel no remorse for this falsehood. As Blanche Bates used to remark in *The Darling of the Gods*, "It is better to lie a little than to be unhappy much." Not that mother *couldn't* cook, and beautifully, but no one who hasn't eaten my wife's fried chicken really knows about culinary art. No one who never saw her cheeks reddened by standing over the stove knows about feminine pulchritude. If I seem rhapsodic, forgive me; I shall try to restrain myself throughout the rest of this chapter.

I had written three acts of *Such a Little Queen* in New York and sent them to Charles Frohman in London, receiving a most encouraging cable in return. Could I have the fourth act ready when he came home in September? That, I thought, would be easy, especially since I should complete this play in the peace and quiet of the country. There were only two flaws in that plan: I couldn't look at anything but the sea, and I couldn't keep awake more than a couple of hours at a time. I had spent my life in cities, where my New-York-loving wife now finds "God's own monoxide gas," and air blowing over salt water and pine trees proved a sedative such as I had never known before. Frequently I dozed before my typewriter and rose to stretch myself on a couch on the porch, drugged beyond rallying with the help of coffee. *Such a Little Queen* was finished the night before C. F. got back to America, and he found the manuscript on his desk next morning.

I had devoted the major part of a year to this piece, and still believe it and *The Little Gray Lady* to be the best of my comedies. Frohman rejected it with a curt note; I didn't know why until several years after his death in the torpedoed *Lusitania*. Then Frohman's general manager told me that C. F. had loved the play and

wanted it for Maude Adams, but just at that time they received a piece written for her by J. M. Barrie and felt it better business to present Miss Adams in that. It was better art, too, since the Barrie work was *What Every Woman Knows*. Later Frohman wanted the *Queen* for London, and when I expressed surprise, wrote me, "The two or three people who told you about my 'disappointment' in the play mentioned are liars."

The rejection was hard on me. I had just weathered the failure of *The Secret Orchard* and invested a large portion of my savings in *The Parsonage*. Worse still, I hadn't yet reached the maturity in which the adverse opinion of a critic, an editor or a manager no longer dynamites self-confidence. The story of *Such a Little Queen* had been suggested by Bayard Veiller's newspaper clipping about Prince Constantine of Greece, who had secured a position in New York at \$15 a week. Mine, then, was the tale of two impoverished royal persons in exile, who cooked lamb chops, with their paper caps, in a dinky flat in St. Nicholas Avenue. Since we had had a world of Zendas and Graustarks, I didn't want my monarchs to come from a mythical kingdom, and Professor Edwin Pahlow, then of Princeton, suggested Bosnia and Herzegovina *because nobody had ever heard of them!* Unluckily for me, no one seemed to have heard of Kings in Exile—either Alphonse Daudet's or actual. Though our program eventually recalled Napoleon III, Louis Philippe and Theodore I of Corsica, all the reviews took my tale with several grains of salt, and one critic wrote: "According to this comedy, thrones are tippy things, and monarchs—in the plural—are quite likely to be jolted off them." That doesn't seem so incredible in this year of gracelessness!

Even now, though, it *does* seem incredible that so many people should have missed the point of what the New York *Sun* discerningly called "a fairy tale of Harlem." Fairies and Harlem may not go well together—but that was the very idea. Further, it was to indicate that a label doesn't "change what's in the can"—that a man's a man whether "he wears a crown or a straw hat." There isn't much doubt about *that* any more, but in those days we still asked, with the cook in my play, "Whoever heard of a snub-nosed Queen?" "A donkey's as good as a nightingale, and a darned sight more useful," as my young American told His Majesty when he



yielded her hand to "the prince concert," "but a donkey's not *like* a nightingale, and, the world over, like likes like." Could any struggling author have characterized his work more plainly than in having his hero remark, "And so you are a fairy Queen?"

And his heroine reply: "Yes. I am not in an ugly old kitchen at all. I am in a beautiful, green-covered book, and I have lived as far as the fiftieth page."

"Why the fiftieth?"

"Because that is generally where the fairy prince comes in."

Could anyone reveal a mood of extravagance more unmistakably than in causing his Queen to move about a kitchen in her coronation robe and mash potatoes with her sceptre?

As you see, I was in love with my play, but I loved alone. I couldn't be downcast that first summer at Shoreham, wallowing in the sea and discovering, to my astonishment, that tomatoes grew on vines, and not underground like potatoes! I couldn't be downcast *any* summer at Shoreham, but I did begin doubting that a curtain would ever rise on *Such a Little Queen*. My own safe-and-sane spouse insisted *she* had no such doubts, but she held on to her job at Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House, making friends of Melba and other famous singers, and afterward directing publicity for the famous old Hippodrome. The fact that so little went on in the theater in hot weather gave us time to get acquainted with our new home, but early autumn found us back at the St. Francis Hotel, working like beavers. I had begun mapping out the piece I abandoned afterward because of Clyde Fitch, but most of my time I spent in managers' offices, trying to persuade them that fame and fortune were to be found in a production of my manuscript.

At last I convinced Henry B. Harris, who, like Frohman, was to meet death in the Atlantic—aboard the *Titanic*. Harry intended the *Queen* for Gertrude Elliott, sister of Maxine and wife of Forbes-Robertson, but became interested in an even younger actress under his own banner. Elsie Ferguson, who had been in the chorus, gave conspicuous promise with Edgar Selwyn in *Pierre of the Plains*, and then made a distinct hit in Jimmie Forbes' *The Traveling Salesman*. We decided she was just the person to play Anna Victoria, and we were right. When I speak of the only women I ever loved, I should include Elsie. She spent a week of the sum-

mer of 1909 with us at Shoreham, where we discussed her role and I saved her from drowning, and I thought her—as she was—about the prettiest and most charming girl I had ever seen. We made a joking compact that if our venture fell short of success we would elope to South Africa, and the opening night I sent Elsie a telegram: “I hope it fails.”

Harris gave *Such a Little Queen* the cast for which authors ask in their prayers. Six of the finest performances I ever witnessed were Elsie’s Anna Victoria, Jessie Ralph’s Mary, the cook; Francis Byrne’s Trainor, the American suitor; Ralph Stuart’s Lauman, the millionaire; and, most especially, George W. Barnum’s portrait of Baron Cosaca, the Prime Minister who couldn’t get used to Harlem, and Frank Gillmore’s Stephen IV of Bosnia. Twenty managers had told me no actor with shiny trousers and in a kitchen could make anyone believe he was a king, but Frank proved them mistaken. Later he became president of the Actors’ Equity Association, and nationally known; he remains my friend. Frank Keenan, the excellent actor who scored so heavily as the sheriff in Belasco’s *The Girl of the Golden West*, directed our first rehearsals but never got the mood of the play, and finally Harris insisted I take his place. I have never believed I was a good director and usually avoided rehearsing my own plays, even after this experience, until one in London left me no choice in the matter.

I have written somewhere that “nothing else is as transparent as the printed page”—that what an author *is* shines through whatever he *does*. Frank Keenan showed me that what an actor *thinks* may be equally visible. Act II of the *Queen* begins with a group of attractive girls chattering, while Harry Sherman, a clerk, surreptitiously rifles the mail. Try as we would, we couldn’t make the audience look at Sherman, and, unless it did so, and witnessed a theft afterward blamed on the King, the end of the act meant nothing. The youth who played Sherman protested, “No man alive can induce an audience to give attention to him while three pretty girls are frolicking on the other side of the stage.” Keenan offered to prove him wrong, and did so at our third performance. From the instant Frank appeared in the scene, none of our customers had eyes for anyone else. The astonished young actor asked Keenan how he did it, and Frank replied, “I began *thinking* about

the theft ten minutes before I came on the stage. My mind was full of 'How can I get that money?' and inevitably the fact showed in my every movement." This power of concentration was what made Frank a fine actor, and since then I have noted it in many other fine actors.

*Such a Little Queen* gave me the longest period of consecutive labor I have ever experienced—a hundred and twelve hours without an hour's rest or a moment's sleep. We were to open in New Haven, and our dress rehearsal there lasted from seven o'clock Sunday evening until dawn of the next day. That was my first night out of bed. Monday, with the initial performance imminent, we were too excited for rest. Besides, there were interviews for the newspapers and a thousand details requiring attention. Before an audience, our third act fell to pieces—failed utterly of its intended effect. We discussed the matter until daybreak, when it was decided I should catch the first train to New York, where we were to open the following Monday, write a new third act there, engage another actor for it, and bring act and actor back with me in the evening. That was my second night out of bed.

Tuesday, at the St. Francis, I wrote the act, engaged the actor, wired the company to meet me on the stage after the performance, and boarded an 8:00 P.M. train for New Haven. We rehearsed from eleven o'clock until breakfast, and that was my third night out of bed.

Wednesday I attended matinee and evening performances of the original third act, making notes for further improvements. A final rehearsal carried us through Wednesday night—my fourth out of bed—and then we went directly to Hartford. Thursday afternoon there we "brushed up," and that evening, in the middle of the new third act, Miss Ferguson's mind suddenly became a blank. Standing in the first entrance, I attempted to give her the lines she had forgotten. They had ceased to mean anything to her. All at once she began sobbing and rushed from the stage. Frank Gillmore, as the King, remarked, "My God, I think she loves me yet," and followed her to the protection of the wings. Frank's improvised speech was perfectly all right, except for the fact that our heroine hadn't mentioned the matter. That part of the third act

was still fifteen minutes off when we lost the Queen of Herzogovina. Menifee Johnstone, who had accompanied me to New Haven on Tuesday, and who never before had seen the play, found himself in undisputed possession of the center of the stage—and the rest of it! He strolled down to the footlights, dropped upon both knees, raised both hands to heaven, and exclaimed: "God save the King!" After we had got Johnstone back of the curtain, which, rung down in haste, had descended behind him, Frank Keenan told the mystified audience that Miss Ferguson had succumbed to the heat.

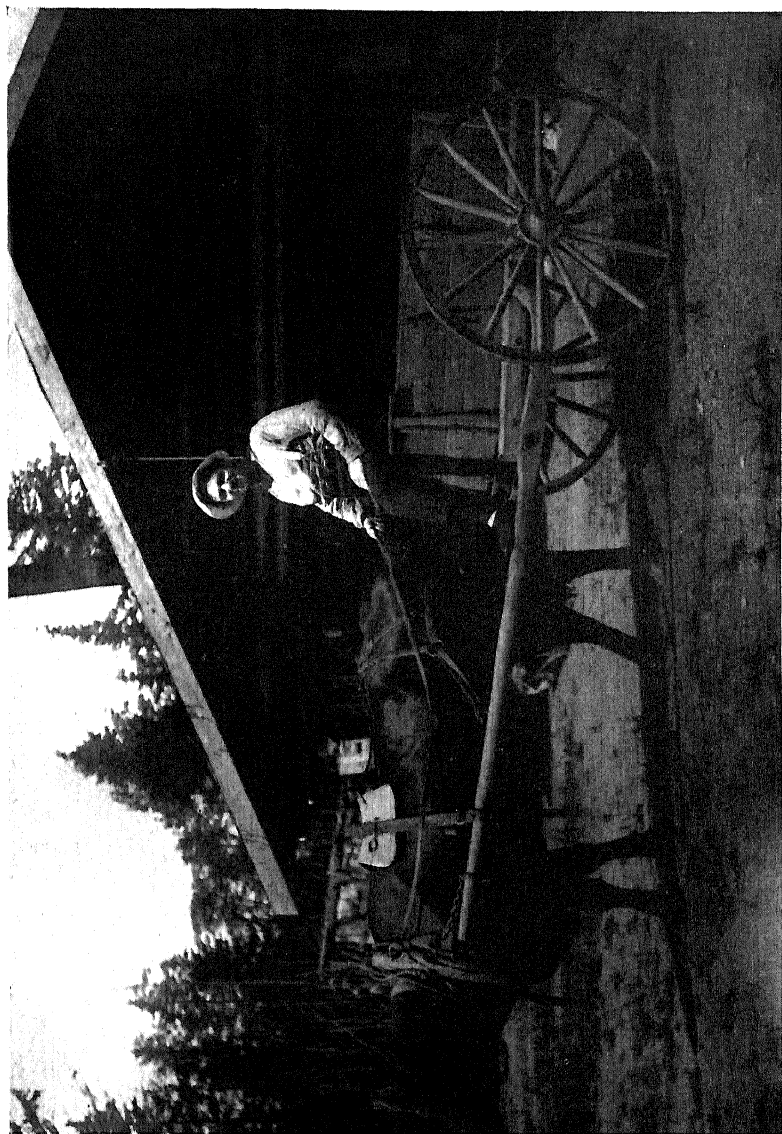
A week later the play did just that. Following a triumphant first night at the Hackett Theater, New York, on August 31, 1909, we entered upon a long torrid spell, and, for that and other reasons our offering never quite found its public. Most of our reviews were fervent, in spite of skepticism as to "tippy" thrones. The *Times* called the piece "a pretty fairy story, related with charm and fragrance," and the *Tribune* found in it "the fantasy and imagination of Barrie," but we had only three months in New York, and a rather meager season on the road. However, Miss Ferguson's hit made her a star overnight, and the play brought me treasured letters from Augustus Thomas, Booth Tarkington and Richard Le Gallienne. Not out of vanity, but because *his* letter was so typical of Le Gallienne, I quote a few lines from it: "How delighted, how forgetful of reality—which is the end of all art—you had made four world-weary men. Yet using reality in so rainbow a fashion, and showing, as I have seldom seen it shown upon the stage, how poetic tragi-comedy is really a sort of prism in which that strange ray we call human life is deliciously broken into mysteriously different and yet so mysteriously related colors."

Is forgetfulness of reality "the end of all art?" I don't think so, but, on the other hand, and as I have written herein and so often elsewhere, neither can I agree that "the end of all art" is to remind us of viciousness and mental disorder. Physicists tell us that "dirt is matter out of place," and it is certainly out of place in books and plays. This isn't a question of morals but of taste, and the restraint that *is* art, and I can never understand why, with all the dirt and ugliness there is in the world, anyone should pay to have it hauled into the theater or the library at three dollars a load. This is a purely

individual bias, of course, but its expression has been so large a part of my life that reference to it may not be unsuitable in an autobiography.

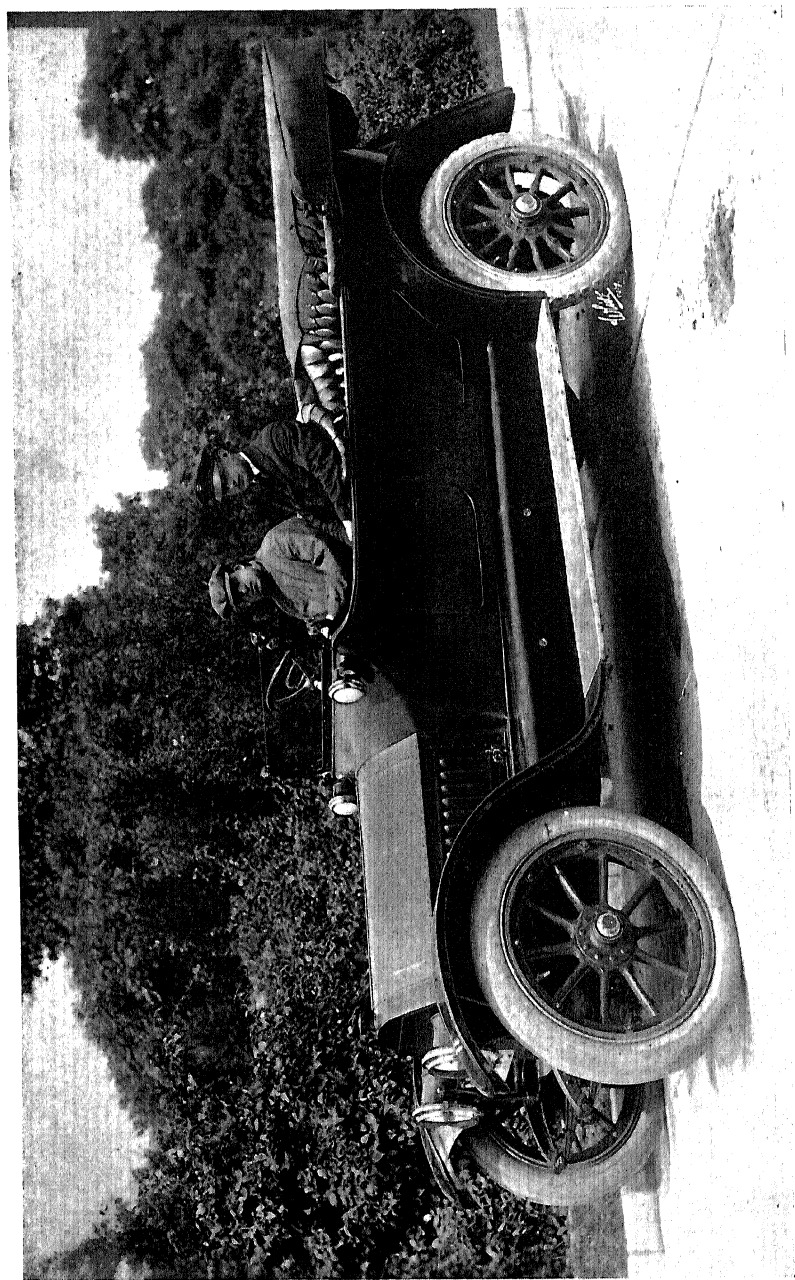
As I never kept books until the income tax made them necessary, I have little idea of my earnings from *Such a Little Queen*. Receipts of plays usually are wildly exaggerated. William A. Brady used to instruct his traveling managers to add \$300 to the true sum when they telegraphed him the box-office returns; thus, a thousand-dollar house became thirteen hundred when Brady showed the telegrams. One night a manager wired: "THEATER BURNED YESTERDAY. NO PERFORMANCE. RECEIPTS \$300." An author's royalties, of course, are a percentage of box-office receipts, averaging 5 per cent of the first \$4,000 that comes in,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the next \$2,000, and 10 per cent of everything over \$6,000. Obviously, therefore, the dramatist may be paid \$100 a week, or less, or, in rare cases, as much as \$2,000 a week from every company presenting his play. I have earned as little as \$53 for a year's work in the theater, and as much as a quarter of a million. The injustice to an author in the aforesaid income tax is that the government takes most of the proceeds of that good year, leaving him to finance himself through the next eight or ten bad ones. Also, that frequently the money paid in the one year may have been earned during several other years of work on that play. When I hear income tax described as "a partnership between the citizen and his government," I think how *I* should like to enter a partnership that gave me most of the profits of productive enterprise and left the other fellow to pull through periods without profit.

With the author's half of the price paid for picture rights—Mary Pickford was the first of two Anna Victorias in the movies—I suppose the *Queen* brought me a trifle more than \$50,000. Of course, this money came in over a period of years, during all of which expenses had to be met. When a newspaper man, Ward Morehouse, reported recently that I had earned two million dollars in the theater, and half as much again by other writing, he may have been accurate, but he covered nearly half a century, during which "the author must live"—though no one seems to know why. *We* had lived frugally, and, as I have said, in good years and bad, put aside 25 per cent of our earnings. In spite of ourselves



ANOTHER "HORSELESS CARRIAGE"

The author wood-gathering at Lake Molunkus, Maine, at the turn of the century.



### MY SECOND MOTOR CAR

"We had set our feet on the road leading to recklessness and ruin."

various things had diminished that nest egg—including the abrupt closing of a couple of banks during the panic of 1907. The spring of 1910, after *Such a Little Queen*, therefore found us with our home built and paid for, two families that had eaten regularly, and a reserve of about \$30,000. This wasn't too bad for an author not yet thirty, but, realizing the hazards of the game, we didn't regard it as security—much less opulence. We knew in advance what was to be proved true—that a season or two of failures and other misfortunes “could wipe us off the slate.” Moreover, we had taken to heart a bit of advice given me by Augustus Thomas: “In success, stay geared for failure; then failure cannot be terrible, and success becomes an unessential if happy accident.”

Even the men of my own thrifty generation might have been astonished at the economy with which my wife and I lived in our new five-room mansion. Not that we, or my other family, lacked anything, but that we hadn't discovered how much trumpery one can regard as absolutely essential. Gus Thomas' advice was bestowed when he saw me in my first automobile. *That* was a second-hand Cadillac that cost \$750, but its purchase had kept me awake nights. We were remote from markets and railway, and I had intended to buy a Ford for about \$400. My daughter persuaded me that this little touring car didn't go with my elevated station. So, out of our \$30,000, we paid \$750 for the Cadillac, feeling that we had set our feet on the road leading to recklessness and ruin. Protected by the veil and goggles then thought indispensable to motor-ing, my wife, I feel sure, never entered that panting, one-lunged, two-doored, gas-lighted, crank-started vehicle without expecting to drive straight to the poorhouse!

The daughter just mentioned was then little older than the Cadillac, but ever so much more luxurious and aristocratic. Inheriting and retaining the Victorianism of her mother, Helen, with her early primness, was a constant delight to me. When she was three, one day a close and elderly male relative reached up under her skirts to pat her starched panties; she astonished everybody by exclaiming, “Here! Here! Here!” Even before that, however, she had manifested the reverse of Puritanism in her desire for perfume, fine raiment, and expensive accouterments. At six or seven she de-



manded embroidery on the starched panties and wept at being compelled to wear aprons over her frocks. Almost from infancy she had exalted ideas of what was fitting for her family, and now that her mother and I have grown older without becoming less frugal, she still reminds us occasionally that her choice of our first car didn't end in our becoming charges on the community.

Within three or four years, many distinguished people had followed us to, or otherwise settled in Shoreham. The number included Harriot Stanton Blatch, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and herself a leader in the women's suffrage movement; Ross McPherson, the noted gynecologist; Tully Marshall, the actor, and his wife, the dramatist, Marion Fairfax; Wallace Irwin and his wife, the novelist, Letitia MacDonald; Leroy Scott, author of *13 Washington Square*, and Miriam Finn Scott, the specialist in child-psychology; William Hurlbut, who wrote *The Fighting Hope*, and Grace Isabel Colbron, critic, editor and translator of Schnitzler and Björnson. One by one these disappeared; our village was incorporated and "put on the map" by the far more common type of suburbanite who prefers porch cocktail parties and dancing in a country club to looking at stars and sea. Quiet and solitude are the two blessings most difficult to attain in America, and particularly in the America that put aside making "the world safe for Democracy" to go in for whoopee in a big way.

One lovely summer afternoon I arrived in Port Jefferson, our nearest town, aboard a yacht owned by Flo Ziegfeld. He and his wife, Billie Burke, were my host and hostess, and they wanted me to remain with them and return to New York. My wife was alone in The Parsonage, and I insisted on spending the night at home, agreeing to join the Ziegfelds for an early breakfast and sailing. We had acquired a maid by then, and I asked her to call me at daybreak. When she did so I found a thick fog obscuring everything, and deciding that no boat would venture out of the harbor, went back to bed again. An hour later I heard the maid scream, and ran down the walk in my pajamas to discover the dead body of our neighbor, William Blatch, the husband of Harriot Stanton Blatch. During the night a high-tension wire supplying our electricity had fallen across the entrance to our property and hidden itself in the honeysuckle. Intending to return a book he had bor-

rowed, Blatch had struck the wire and been killed instantly. His body was literally cooking when I found it.

Lacking another implement, I tore off the sign identifying The Parsonage, meaning to draw away the wire. The board, wet with fog, carried enough current to knock me down. Rising and realizing what had occurred, I got a dry wooden rake, removed the wire and went for a doctor. He was of no use, and I telephoned the coroner, who said the body must not be touched until he saw it. As he had not arrived two hours later, with Ziegfeld's help I took Blatch to his home, having summoned Mrs. Blatch and his daughter, then the wife of Lee de Forest, all of whom were in New York. Only that morning's mist saved me; if I had not gone back to bed when the maid rapped, I should have been the first to cross the path of that murderous wire.

The Ziegfelds spent the day with us, and Flo suggested that we restore the sign to its post. However, it was never put back. Our place remained nameless until, after Wallace Irwin had narrowly escaped walking over the edge of our cliff, we made it safe with the railing from a dismantled yacht. To that we fastened life preservers, and now only the green of our lawn distinguishes this spot from a boat deck. Carl Van Vechten insisted then that we rechristen our home The Ship's Rail. Under whatever name, the roses smell as sweet, and myriad lights shine as brightly at night in "that inverted bowl they call the sky." The wash of the sea drowns the foolish clamor of the jazz band at the country club, as it will drown whatever other clamors succeed it in millennia to come.

## OF CABBAGES AND BASIL KING

HOW do *you* explain your mistakes? Most of us find ready "alibis"; someone else did this, or that, or the other thing to us. My "alibi" was Rennold Wolf. Ren, who still provided the featured column on the *Morning Telegraph*, wanted to write musical comedies and couldn't without help. He had superlative wit, but little invention and no instinct for construction. Wolf and I had become warm friends while I worked for the Shuberts. Every morning at seven we boxed and played handball in the old West Side Y. M. C. A., in West Fifty-seventh Street, with teams that included Douglas Fairbanks, Leroy Scott, Arthur Hammerstein, son of Oscar, and a manager on his own account; a city fireman, and the owner of a small restaurant in Eighth Avenue. That Y. M. C. A. always seemed to me the perfect democracy; chiefly, I think, because we wore only shorts in the gym, and clothes are the instant reminders of social status. A naked fireman, restaurant keeper or playwright in a gym is the same as any other man—unless he plays handball better.

Wolf was always suggesting that I collaborate with him on "a musical show," and because I was fond of him I was willing to do so. However, the real reasons for a wrong-turning that took the best ten years of my life were more complicated, and more deeply rooted in my own weaknesses. I was thirty years old and owned my home and \$30,000, but that wasn't enough. I had set a financial goal which would leave me safe to write the kind of play I wanted to write and permit me to insist that my wife retire from business. I was vexed with myself that she had thought it necessary to continue wage earning four years after our marriage, and I was anxious to provide luxuries she had never enjoyed. Our

home was still a rough shack, standing on locust posts amid wire grass and beach plums, and there was constant temptation to put into it more than we thought we could afford.

I had produced nine plays and worked nearly twice that number of hours every day since my fifteenth or sixteenth year without "getting anywhere." Measured in terms of savings, each play had given me an average of not more than \$4,000. Worse than that, I felt that none of them had greatly advanced my standing as a dramatist. This was not true. Unearthing a forgotten box of letters and newspaper clippings not long ago, I found that, as Maurice Campbell had said of *The Little Gray Lady*, I was on the verge of success and didn't know it. Dozens of reviews insisted I had given greater promise than most young men writing for our theater, and, perhaps out of friendship but none the less persuasively, Clyde Fitch had told an interviewer in London that I combined "the freshest talent with the keenest observation of life and an extremely ripe craftsmanship. Within the next few years, he is likely to be the outstanding dramatist in America."

I should have been nothing of the sort, but it was a serious if not fatal blunder to turn my back on the goal and devote the most fertile decade in any man's sowing and reaping to silly jingles and nonsensical stories. The jingles, perhaps, were my major temptation. I have always enjoyed writing verse more than anything else, and at that period had sold tons of it to various periodicals. This writing came easy, and I had a certain gift for it. Finally, as I admired the *Bab Ballads* and the *Ingoldsby Legends*, I believed there could be few higher achievements than *Pinafore* or *The Mikado*, and, in common with so many others, I felt that I might make the grade. I had a craftsman's interest in experimenting with logical plots for musical comedy, and even a somewhat hazy idea of light music combined with a really serious story. I was to attempt that later and fail dismally.

Meanwhile, in 1910, after the production of *Such a Little Queen*, I contracted with Klaw & Erlanger for a dramatization of the best-selling novel Basil King had published anonymously under the title *The Inner Shrine*. King, who lived at Cambridge, Massachusetts, had been a clergyman, and, returning from abroad, had shocked his wife by appearing with a scarred face and little of

the hair that covered his head when she had seen him last. He had been conscious of no illness, but the change in him was marked and alarming, and physicians here told him it was due to complete failure of the thyroid gland. A brutally frank specialist in Switzerland confirmed this diagnosis, and predicted that "within a year you will die of softening of the brain." Instead, King had come back to America and at forty, began writing novels. Five of these had won scant attention, when, in 1909, he produced *The Inner Shrine*. As I was doing, Basil devoted himself to what he regarded as distinctly minor works until he could afford to attempt something more important. He will be remembered, if at all, by *The Abolishing of Death* and *The Conquest of Fear*, thoughtful books that were among the last to come from his pen.

At the suggestion of Marc Klaw I went to Boston and lunched with King at the Touraine Hotel. He was past fifty then, and his ailment had completely disfigured him. His eyes were red-rimmed, and practically without lids, so that when he came to Shoreham later he was unable to spend the night with us because he had forgotten to bring a kind of gum with which he pasted them down in order to sleep. He wore almost black glasses, with gold mesh extending to his cheeks, so that no one could be horrified by the sight of these injured eyes. There was no hair on his head or body, and his face was scarred as though he had survived an explosion. King could not abolish death, but he conquered fear and disability. By sheer courage he overcame natural but corrosive sensitiveness as to his looks, and compelled himself to go about with his friends and in public. He wrote every day—books and the most delightful letters that have been composed in our generation. More than a hundred of these are among my treasures. Basil King was the most civilized man I ever met; a great epicure, a great friend, and the most brilliant conversationalist of my experience. Five or six times we dined together at the old Knickerbocker Hotel in New York, intending to go to a theater afterward, and decided we'd rather stay where we were and chat. Two or three times we remained to have supper, and once to breakfast at the same table.

As a judge of food and wine, King had few equals. He wanted to know Rex Beach, and when I promised a meeting, suggested it be at a dinner for three he proposed giving at the old Brevoort.

Basil had ordered a Chateau burgundy and complained that it was not of the right vintage. The waiter showed him the label, but Basil remained unconvinced. Finally the chief cellarer admitted that several bottles of that wine had sweated off their labels, and that he probably had made a mistake in restoring them. There is no doubt of that in my mind, and there was no possibility that the man was "playing up" to a customer. Basil was among the only three or four persons I ever knew who could drink from a napkin-covered bottle and call the brand and vintage almost unerringly. Most self-proclaimed epicures are pure fakes. Once I served a particularly boastful example with cheap claret in an old, cobwebbed bottle I had thrown away and found again. To the chagrin of my wife, who had been taken in by his accounts of himself, our guest closed his eyes in ecstasy, and murmured: "*What a wine!*"

King was deeply religious, and it was he who first persuaded me to read the Bible. I had been told that one *must* read the Bible as an act of piety, and therefore, of course, I had avoided it. Basil said the New Testament and parts of the Old were the most thrilling drama ever written, so I devoured them within a few weeks and found him right. However, Basil *lived* his religion rather than preached it, and with an enjoyment of life and a sense of humor I recommend to "professional good men." These, I think, are the world's worst advertisement for virtue. Much of the love Basil bore me was due to the fact that I never treated him as a clergyman. Our familiar joke was that, though he had resided there, King had never *seen* Paris and that I was to take him back and "corrupt" him. When he was thought to be dying, his daughter Penelope wired me to "come at once," and, obeying, I found Basil in the midst of gloom and despair. Entering his shaded and silent room, I said, "Why, you old scoundrel, are you going to die uncorrupted?" Basil laughed, revived, and survived to dine with me a dozen times in New York. I have several letters in which he insists, very seriously, that I saved his life.

King's ultimate passing is one of two excellent stories I know of the same sort. He had been dangerously ill again but continued work on a book he was determined to leave completed. Every morning John, his colored servant, fastened a specially constructed desk to Basil's bed and then left him alone. Returning just before

noon one day, John found the dead body of his friend and employer. Basil's fingers still clutched a pencil, and before him on the desk was a page on which he had written "Finis." He had completed his book, and died.

My second story is of Sir James Charles, captain of the *Aquitania* and Commodore of the Cunard Fleet, who, retired because of his age, ended his last voyage, brought his vessel into Southampton, and breathed his last on the bridge as the hawsers were thrown aboard. Jimmie Charles, I think, committed suicide by force of will. He had spent with me and with our mutual friend, Bill Graham, his last night ashore and was in despair at being relieved of his command. "I've been at sea since I was fourteen," he said. "I can take a ship into any harbor in the world without a pilot, but I'm in a panic every time I cross Times Square!"

My first luncheon with Basil King in Boston was a success, but our play failed. Frankly, it was a very bad play, though Basil would never admit the fact. Finished that summer, when I was on the verge of a breakdown that afterward took me to Bermuda and the Bahamas with the William Blatch who was to be killed at The Parsonage, it never had a chance. Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, the author who also was a famous neurologist, attributed this first of my several smashups to the strain of that five days of unremitting labor with *Such a Little Queen*. Be that as it may, Klaw & Erlanger surrendered their option on *The Inner Shrine*, Basil renewed mine time and again without payment of any sort, and finally the play was produced by a second-rate management with a third-rate cast in a fourth-rate town in Pennsylvania. Even the best book or play can be murdered by a second-rate publisher or manager, and this four-act melodrama was far from being the best. Its nearest approach to New York was the Bronx Opera House, where it passed away, unhonored and unsung, in November 1913. All I ever got out of it was some motion-picture money, and one of the finest friendships of a life that has been rich in friendship.

Two or three years before that, I went to an Italian restaurant back of Jefferson Market Police Court to dine with Avery Hopwood. During the meal I advanced my theory that the best farce is a melodrama carried ever so slightly beyond bounds. Hopwood

couldn't agree, and I asked him to name a melodramatic story I could use for example. Avery suggested Archibald Clavering Gunther's *My Official Wife*. This is the tale of a man bound for Czarist Russia with a passport valid for himself and his wife. The latter cannot make the journey, and at the border the former is persuaded to take with him, in her place, a lady in distress whose mother, she says, is dying in Moscow, and who proves to be a hunted Nihilist. Obviously, nothing could be simpler than to make comic the predicament of the innocent tourist, saddled with a companion he never saw before, but whose husband he must seem to be, unless he wants to land in Siberia. I was so pleased with my extemporized version of this old melodrama that next day I described it to Rennold Wolf, and asked, "Wouldn't that be a capital story for a musical comedy?"

Ren agreed enthusiastically, and I called on the Selwyns, who were agents for Gunther. With them I contracted for use of the plot, specifically in a musical comedy, and on condition that no reference be made to its origin. Archie Selwyn said he still derived considerable revenue from *My Official Wife*, which would cease if it were known that the play was being presented under another title. I signed this agreement and another with Henry B. Harris, in which Ren and I promised to finish this light opera for the popular comedian, Sam Bernard. To borrow the title of another old melodrama, this was my "first false step."

Long after the production of this piece, in 1911, Hopwood and I dined together again and he insisted on paying the check. "My last previous meal in your company netted me a fortune," he said. "The next day I bought from the Selwyns the right to make a play of *My Official Wife*."

"But you never did so," I suggested.

"Of course, and the piece was a huge success—*Nobody's Widow*."

The Selwyns had sold Ren and me musical-comedy rights, and Hopwood dramatic rights to the same story, and that was why none of us was permitted to announce that his work was founded on *My Official Wife*. The remarkable part of the incident was that our version, *The Red Widow*, ran for a whole season within two blocks of the theater where *Nobody's Widow* had just ceased run-



ning, and neither the critics nor the authors of the two plays ever guessed that they originated with the same idea. A work of art is a work of individuality, and I have always contended that if two literary artists agreed to write the same story and tried their utmost, the narratives when completed would bear little resemblance to each other. This in itself disposes of the charge of plagiarism brought against almost every successful author, and of which I shall have more to say at the proper time. As a matter of fact, Hopwood never *actually* bought *My Official Wife* because before the contract could be signed he had gone so far afield of its plot that—rightly—he saw no necessity for doing so. Many years later I purchased dramatic rights in a short story by O. Henry, only to find that I had read—but not recognized—the same story in *The Arabian Nights*.

Like most of my more prosperous efforts, *The Red Widow* was some time finding a producer. Otherwise, my career as a librettist might have ended with that one venture, even though it did prove exceedingly profitable. When the *Widow* was finished, however, Sam Bernard didn't care for it, and Victor Herbert declined to supply the score—chiefly because Ren and I had featured a song called "Vodka," and Victor said he couldn't write music about a product of sour potatoes! Finally Henry B. Harris told us he proposed building and operating New York's first cabaret, and would surrender *The Red Widow* if we would substitute an entertainment for this enterprise. We agreed, and our first-born went begging. Managers all seemed mindful of the advice given Sam Weller to beware of widows. At last we found a producer in Cohan and Harris, and a star in Raymond Hitchcock. Of that negotiation, what I remember best is that while I was reading our third act I glanced up and saw George Cohan staring out of the window of his office at Broadway and Forty-second Street. Hurt, I protested, "If you're not interested in this play I won't waste your time or mine."

"I *am* interested," George answered; "I'm going to produce it. But look; it doesn't seem possible, but *there isn't a horse in Times Square!*" So recently was "the noblest animal" dethroned by the automobile, though, as I write, war scarcity of gas and rubber promises to bring Dobbin back to his own!

While *The Red Widow* was going the rounds, Ren and I toiled at our separate jobs, and jointly on the proposed piece for Henry B. Ren was still on the *Telegraph*, of course, and I had begun what was to be ten years of writing a monthly article for a magazine published in Chicago and called the *Green Book*. The editor of this magazine was Ray Long, afterward paid a record-breaking salary at the helm of Hearst's *Cosmopolitan*, and—may I say again?—as so often happens, ruined by his success. At the apex of his fortunes he ran away to the South Seas with a companion, returned broke and forgotten, and finally, having lost his next job with a third-rate periodical, blew out his brains in Hollywood. On the *Green Book* Ray proved himself a great editor and a good friend. My articles were extremely well liked, and their frequent allusion to The Lady Who Goes to the Theatre With Me—otherwise my wife—made that figure familiar to thousands of readers. The *Green Book* was the only enterprise to which I ever seemed indispensable; shortly after my retirement from its pages the magazine stopped publication—though I can only hope *that* was the whole reason!

In 1910 New York had never heard of a night club, and its nearest approach to refreshment with entertainment had been the few variety houses and roof gardens where smoking was permitted and drinks could be obtained. Henry B. Harris built the Folies-Bergère, which is now the Fulton, with a kitchen and every other facility for serving elaborate meals. Instead of the usual rows of seats, tables and moveable chairs occupied most of two floors. The enterprise was costly, and Harry took in as a partner Jesse Lasky, afterward a movie producer but then fresh from vaudeville where he had played some sort of musical instrument. Jesse's wife was a sister of Samuel Goldfish, who, during his subsequent Hollywood association with the Selwyns, combined the last syllable of their name with the first of his own, and became Sam Goldwyn. Blanche Lasky dominated the whole business, and not to its advantage. Wolf and I wrote a song about lonely debutantes, bored in their Park Avenue homes, but when they appeared at the dress rehearsal we were amazed to find them in frocks slit from the hem to their armpits, disclosing an almost boundless expanse of pink tights. We complained that our song should have been sung by shy little maids demurely gowned, but the argument got us nothing.

The show at the Folies-Bergère was divided into three parts—"Hell," a "profane burlesque" written by Wolf and myself; a ballet, called "Temptation," and "Gaby," a revue by Harry B. and Robert Smith. After the first week or two of rehearsals I insisted that my name should not appear on the program, which left Ren all the glory of "Hell," but I have never worked harder on anything. Our basic idea was not without ingenuity. "All the good people go to heaven," our Satan declared; "all the best people come here." We depicted Hades as "the most popular of Winter resorts," cooled by electric fans, run by a fat, jovial Devil, impersonated by Otis Harlan, and populated by nearly everybody in the news of the day. The skit began with the coming to life of the Bartholdi statue, who announced that she was the only Liberty left in New York, and then we proceeded to make slightly mad fun of whatever was being widely discussed. A great to-do had been raised about the production of *Salome* at the Metropolitan Opera House, so our Dance of the Seven Veils was interrupted by police who ran down the aisles and climbed over the footlights, repeating Mayor Gaynor's demand for "a clean stage."

"Go to it," said Otis Harlan, giving each policeman a pail and brush, with which each began scrubbing while the dance went on.

In that dime museum in Salt Lake City there had once been a "headless giant," but I have never seen anything else as headless as this particular enterprise. Some of the chaos was comic, but all of it was expensive. One might have thought our show run by the government. I shall never forget one example of the kind of disorder possible in the theater. Descending from earth, Satan made his first entrance through a transparent chute. This was accomplished by dropping a dummy attached to an invisible wire, and when it reached the bottom, Otis Harlan rolled out. He had scarcely done so at the dress rehearsal, when a stagehand pulled the dummy back up the chute and into position for the next performance. The beholders saw one Satan tumble onto the stage, while another rose skyward in the transparent chute. We were told it wouldn't happen again, but it did, the following afternoon. We protested to the management, which protested to the stage manager, who protested to the stagehand, but at our final rehearsal Satan continued to be twins. This went on for an entire week in Atlantic

City, where the stagehand was threatened with dismissal, but at the opening in New York Otis Harlan tumbled onto the stage while his double went up the chute. They were still doing it when I witnessed a final performance nearly a year later in Brooklyn.

Our preliminary engagement in Atlantic City was preceded by a rehearsal that lasted, without interruption, twenty-three hours. I have seen—heaven help me!—rehearsals longer than that, but no other so entirely mad. One of our features was a march in which a squad of sixteen shapely “guards” maneuvered in real armor. Each suit weighed about fifty pounds, and after a dozen repetitions we reached a point at which the line never started down stage without at least one girl fainting and falling with the noise of a string of tin cans tossed into an empty wash boiler. Always, the girl was picked up and laid out in one of the aisles; the line was re-formed, the march began again, and another girl fainted. When the auditorium was littered with fallen women, the rehearsal was called off. . . . It was after another such ordeal with the *Ziegfeld Follies*, nearly a decade later, that I reached my hotel after daybreak and found a telegram from my daughter. The family had had a good deal of fun about my going away with a bevy of “glorified” show girls, and thought the joke too good to drop immediately. My telegram read: “CHANNING POLLOCK, SHELburnE HOTEL, ATLANTIC CITY. REMEMBER, PAPA DEAR, GOD IS WATCHING YOU.” Victor Herbert said he knew Ziegfeld was, “so both sides are represented.”

The first performance of “Hell” naturally fell short of success. Harry B. Smith, summoned in haste, sat through a second showing, advised the management to drop his skit and extend ours, and went home again. Flocks of song writers, learning that we lacked a good number and ambitious to supply one, appeared from the circumambient ether. Among the first of these was Irving Berlin, then a frail, black-haired and black-eyed youth of twenty-three, who brought with him a ballad that he called “sure fire.” He played and sang it to the powers that were, and they would have none of it. The song was “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” and it would have saved our lives. I have read many accounts of where and by whom this sensationally successful tune was first rendered in public, but the truth is that the historic event took place during our Wednesday matinee in Atlantic City. Quite without authorization Otis Harlan,

who had been part of the group that sat in judgment, sang one verse without accompaniment during a pantomimic scene, and the audience broke into applause. Ren and I knew then that Irving had written his first big hit—but the management didn't.

I had spent considerable time with Berlin at the Friars' Club, and now Harris and Lasky insisted that we collaborate to produce something better than "Alexander's Ragtime Band." That proved difficult—especially since neither of us had slept during the past forty-eight hours. Irving was then, and probably still is, a one-fingered virtuoso. All that night we sat in his room at the Shelburne, Irving patiently picking his tune from the piano with the index finger of his right hand, while I struggled for a lyric that would fit it. At daylight Berlin had played his composition several hundred times, and I had achieved a single couplet that ran:

"And, dearie, if your wife comes buzzin',  
Tell her that I'm your cousin."

This masterpiece never got into "Hell," though it deserved to, and Irving's ultimate contribution was a ballad called "Take Me Down to the Folies-Bergère," which took no one there.

Aside from our management, the authors and some of the actors, the funniest thing in our show was the pantomime that permitted one single performance of "Alexander's Ragtime Band." This pantomime was a burlesque of a notorious prize fight in which the contestants had been two society men. Harlan and Taylor Holmes, one of our best comedians and afterward a star of some magnitude, made this burlesque uproarious, but it was missing from our Saturday matinee. When I asked why, Harris explained, "My chauffeur thought it was vulgar." The pantomime was restored that night, and proved to be the outstanding hit of our performance in New York.

Besides Harlan and Holmes our company included Ada Lewis, who had won fame with Harrigan and Hart; Ethel Levey, who was then the wife of George M. Cohan; and, later, a variety performer who called herself Olga Petrova. Madame Petrova was English, but, as she relates in her memoirs, *Butter with My Bread*, won success only after she had assumed an exotic personality. This gave me

the idea that afterward suggested my more-or-less-popular novel, *Star Magic*. Madame Petrova's book relates the adventures of her pet boa constrictor, but, though her version is more dependable, I prefer the account then current, which was that the big snake got wedged in the drain of a water-closet in her hotel, and after some excitement, was extracted by no less a person than Richard Harding Davis.

Opening early in 1911, the Folies-Bergère was advertised as "the smartest restaurant in New York, blended with the smartest theater and music hall in the world." Both the food and the entertainment were good, but our metropolis hadn't learned to take both at one time. We were still—thank the Lord!—many years from the present in which it is almost impossible to eat, talk or taxi without "music." A death blow to the enterprise was struck by the New York *World*, which published a first-page story demonstrating that two people could not enjoy food and entertainment at the Folies-Bergère for much less than \$40. I don't know whether that was true, as I never dined there, but the high cost of doing so became a legend and the subject of dozens of jokes, after which only the bravest and most opulent of our citizens ever went near the place. Harris' investment had been huge, and the failure of the enterprise practically ruined him. *The Red Widow*, which he had shelved in favor of this venture, earned a considerable fortune.

The experience, however, was not without its advantage. Harry, one of the most discerning, intelligent and prosperous of our managers, had become another example of the dangers of success. Charles Frohman once said to me, "God help a manager after his productions become only so many push buttons on his desk!" When he presented my *Little Queen*, Harry was the most reasonable, generous and amenable of men. Already, however, his productions were becoming "push buttons." By the time of the Folies-Bergère he had grown to be so difficult that when early in 1912 he proposed that Wolf and I write a musical comedy for Clifton Crawford, I declined to discuss the matter. Later it was arranged by Wolf, and the evening before Harris was to sail for Europe we went to his office to sign the contracts. This ceremony performed, Harry leaned back in his chair and said, "Channing, you think I've been a damned fool, and I *know* I have. I thought I was the smartest man

God ever made, and nobody could talk to me. I don't blame *you* for refusing to do so. But I've learned my lesson, and when I get back from this trip you're going to find me 100 per cent the old Harry."

He never got back. In April, when *My Best Girl* had been completed for Crawford, my wife and I attended a premiere at the George M. Cohan Theater. Between the acts we heard rumors of the disaster to the "unsinkable" *Titanic*, which struck an iceberg and sank on her maiden voyage. As we were leaving the theater an illuminated bulletin on the Times Building across the way flashed "Henry B. Harris among victims of *Titanic*." His widow René, who had been with him, returned to tell me "what a big man Harry was." I knew. Almost anyone can die bravely, but it takes a really "big man" to admit that he has lived foolishly.

## RENNOLD WOLF

OSCAR WILDE wrote, "There is nothing like the love of a married woman; it is something no married man ever knows anything about," and the same sort of observation might be made of friendship between men. Certainly no other friendship is as enduring, or in some ways as precious. Lovers quarrel, before and after marriage, but I have never had a misunderstanding with a man friend—though many of these associations have lasted over forty years. Friendship between women is notoriously unstable, and that between man and woman, though it may be very fine and in my case often has been, presents difficulties and dangers. The Damon and Pythias relation is one never wholly understood by the other sex, which is apt to resent it, but it is a theme that rarely fails in literature or drama.

My friendship with Rennold Wolf began while I was with the Shuberts, in 1903 or 1904, and lasted until his death in 1922. When we met, Ren had just turned thirty, and was known from one end of the country to the other for his daily column in the *Morning Telegraph*. This was really *two* columns of the news of Broadway, much of it written in the language of Broadway, and all of it spiced with a wit as individual as it was incisive. When Ren wrote of me, "Channing Pollock makes all his own clothes," or of De Wolf Hopper that Greek excavations had revealed an inscription over the portal of a nunnery which, translated, ran, "You can't keep De Wolf from the door," only Broadway quite understood, but America laughed. Wolf made his newspaper indispensable to everyone in the theater. A popular jest of the day defined a chorus girl's breakfast as a cocktail and a copy of the *Morning Telegraph*.

Broadway was a nation within itself, with its own boundaries,



its own brand of humor and code of honor, its own lingo, celebrities and national anthem. I have heard "Give My Regards to Broadway" sung with as much feeling as ever went into "The Marseillaise," and have known Broadwayites who, returning from an enforced absence in Florida or California, kissed the stones of the Grand Central Station. Wide latitude was allowed in manners and morals, and sympathy for the faithless husband was as general as contempt for the holier-than-thou and the high-brow. Times Square's favorite story related how Sam Harris, nettled by John Corbin's criticism of a play by George Cohan, sat through an after-dinner speech in which Corbin quoted Aristotle, Socrates and most of the Greek dramatists, and then muttered: "The son of a gun; *now* I know why he didn't like *Little Johnnie Jones!*" Broadway proudly recounted the adventures of another of its chief figures, a manager we may call Tom Smith, in supplying grounds for a divorce from an equally popular actress. Tom, it appears, had taken his appointed co-respondent to a hotel on the understanding that before anything very serious occurred, he was to drop his boot as a signal to the waiting detectives. The co-respondent was not alluring and when they had removed enough apparel to be legally compromised, Tom dropped the boot. Nothing happened. Tom went on dropping boots to the complete puzzlement of the lady, and, at long last, a porter appeared, with his hand out, and the information that he had "chased the dicks away." The legend recited how Tom, still trying to be apprehended, was delayed by hotel clerks, cabmen and others who wanted to save him, until, breaking away, he ran after the man hunters. Unfortunately, they had been hunted all evening and when they saw their quarry pursuing them, fled at top speed, and were never seen again.

A Cornell graduate who had practiced law in Buffalo, Rennold Wolf had no hopes, dreams or comprehensions beyond Columbus Circle. What George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are to you and me, George Cohan and Abraham Lincoln Erlanger were to Wolf. When Marc Klaw spoke of first nighters as "theater habitués and sons of habitués," Ren would have carved the words in the stone of a Temple of Thespis. Such twisted views were superficial manifestations that did not affect his passionate loyalty, his strict honesty, and his enormous capacity for hard work. He had vision, too;

a sort of sixth sense that penetrated men and events. Ren was at Shoreham the day the Archduke Francis Ferdinand was assassinated at Serajevo. The report was printed on the second page of my newspaper, which featured a speech Mayor John Purroy Mitchel had delivered in New York, and I made some light comment as to the unimportance of an Archduke more or less. Ren looked at me gravely. "Can't you see," he said, "that this is going to turn hell loose? You can take it from me: For the rest of our lives we're in a bum generation." Jeremiah never uttered a prophecy more accurate!

In an era of great after-dinner speakers—Chauncey Depew, Simeon Ford, Augustus Thomas and Patrick Francis Murphy—Ren was counted among the best. As a matter of fact, he conceded *that* in a sketch of himself in *Who's Who in America*. This was one of the small vanities common to most of us. Ren always insisted to me that his postprandial witticisms were wholly extemporary. Of course I knew that was impossible, and when I became his executor I found them in every stage of development in his desk drawer. A certain type of "wisecrack" may come at call, but speeches bristling with epigrams require preparation. One must think out a sentence like the one Ren used in introducing Abe Hummel, the celebrated divorce lawyer: "When he finds a rift in the lute, he widens the rift and collects the loot." The truth is that Ren would slave tirelessly for a single phrase. Once at Shoreham, when we had struggled all night for a simile, Ren sustained me with "Cheer up, Swede; if it were easy, *everybody'd* do it." In his column Wolf had alluded to me as "the eminent Swedish dramatist," and was so amused that ever afterward he addressed me as "Swede." Not everyone appreciated the joke. At the end of his first period of rehearsals with us Reginald De Koven, composer of *Robin Hood*, remarked, "You two fellows are so wholly masculine that I can't understand Wolf calling you 'sweet.'"

From 1910 to 1917 Ren and I collaborated on seven musical comedies and a play. In the order of their appearance these were "Hell," *The Red Widow*, *My Best Girl*, *The Beauty Shop*, *Her Little Highness*, *A Perfect Lady*, the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1915*, and *The Grass Widow*. Half the number proved profitable, and three were

outstanding successes. There was never a contract between us, nor do I recall anything but the sketchiest of oral agreements. Ren usually collected royalties and remitted his check for my share without verification beyond a penciled, "Dear Swede: Here's your half of last week's swag." As his executor I came into possession of a ledger he had kept carefully, and found only one inequality in this division of the spoils—whenever it required splitting twenty-five cents, Ren kept twelve and sent me thirteen.

These eight joint efforts were not without their adventures, of course, and brought me into association with many interesting people. Harry B. Smith, who wrote the book of *Robin Hood*, was the author of so many libretti that he himself had lost count of them. Once he showed me a sheet of his letter paper with a list of nearly a hundred titles and remarked, "I've left off all but the big hits; *this* is for the country trade." Harry's obsession was his collection of first editions and other rare works—one of the finest in the world. His facility was almost beyond belief. I have seen him set down the words for a waltz on a pad lying atop a piano on which someone was thumping out a tango being rehearsed noisily by a dancing chorus. This is a feat that dwarfs the childish game of "patting your head and rubbing your belly."

De Koven, one of the two foremost composers of his time, was the complete Sybarite. He had earned one fortune, married another, and invested much of both in a ducal palace on Park Avenue. Here Wolf and I lunched or dined frequently, surrounded by liveried lackeys, and discussing managers, music publishers and chorus girls. De Koven was the only composer with whom I ever worked who insisted that lyrics be written to his music, instead of the other way about. To make this more difficult, Reg complained bitterly of everything except what he called "open vowels." These were helpful to the singer, but hard on authors. Lines ending with "blue" and "true" delighted De Koven, while, of course, *we* thought them contemptible, and strove for ingenious rhymes. Not that fitting even "blue" and "true" to De Koven's intricate musical designs was a simple chore. Often, it suggested the putting together of jig-saw puzzles. I remember one chorus, made up of counterpoint and other devices for spoiling the lives of lyric writers, on which Ren and I labored all night only to learn next morning

that Reg had decided to substitute a quite different melody he liked better.

Reg was a great dandy, never without his monocle and his thin little cane. I grew very fond of him, but most of the critics disliked him cordially, and praise was rarely his portion. *Her Little Highness*, in which Mizzi Hajos made her debut as a star, was a version of my own *Such a Little Queen*, and I still think De Koven's score for it one of the most delightful I ever heard. His theme song, "My Fairy Prince," later was played between the acts of my *The House Beautiful*, and never failed of a round of applause. Nevertheless, newspaper scorn of De Koven was among the misfortunes that overcame *Her Little Highness*. Making an ill-advised curtain speech at the premiere, Reg tripped over a chain before the footlights, and the *New York World* said this was the first time a composer had "fallen down twice in the same evening." A good many people had "fallen down" that night, but, except physically, Reg was not one of them. Our first act ended in an ovation, and then a clumsy stage crew was responsible for a half hour's intermission that really settled us. Business was improving, however, when a blizzard administered the *coup de grâce*.

Reg was depressed as he couldn't have been if his food and lodging had depended upon the result. Long afterward he would play "My Fairy Prince," and ask me, "Is *that* what *you'd* call 'falling down?'" Reg died in January 1920, and, at his request I visited him just before this. He was stretched out in his "Lohengrin bed," with carved swans at the foot and a priceless brocade serving as canopy. One gouty leg, swathed in bandages, was suspended from the ceiling. A servant brought Reg a bowl of bread and milk and me an elaborate luncheon of duck with wild rice. The door had hardly closed behind this man when Reg said, "Here, you eat the bread and milk and give me the duck. *You* can get duck *anywhere*, and I can't. What's more, only God knows how I hate bread and milk." We made the exchange, and then Reg drank a pint of champagne that had been sent me by Mrs. De Koven.

I had known Victor Herbert before this period, and you shall hear more of him in a chapter devoted to the *Ziegfeld Follies*. Except for Herbert, Ziegfeld and Gene Buck, our closest associate was Raymond Hitchcock, the resourceful comedian who spent five

years in two of our pieces—*The Red Widow* and *The Beauty Shop*. Both were produced by Cohan and Harris, and that was the beginning of my long friendship with George M. Cohan, one of the most talented and generally admirable men in our theater. George directed brilliantly the rehearsals of both musical comedies. I can see him now, sitting on his heels at the dress rehearsal of *The Red Widow*, at the Colonial Theater, Boston, and crying, "For God's sake, get excited! *She's* going to kill a guy!" The "guy" in question was supposed to be merely the Czar of all the Russias. That night George caught a train back to Broadway. One of his own plays was to open the next evening in New York, and George hadn't written the last act!

Hitchcock's comedy was a combination of sheer lunacy with great skill and shrewd understanding of the grotesque. This understanding was really remarkable. In *The Beauty Shop* Hitch had a scene with a timetable that, written to occupy two minutes, actually *played* seven—the extra five taken up by laughter. The biggest laugh followed Hitch's reading from the folder, "Chinese must not be *ticked* from Manila," to which he added, "No—'*ticketed*.' I thought that must be wrong; Chinese are *so* unresponsive." Of course that doesn't sound funny to you, and it didn't to me, but Hitchcock's reading of the line in his husky voice, with his precise timing and his expression of utter bewilderment, made it irresistible. A minor example of that shrewdness was Hitchy's change of a word in another line. During a weeping chorus Hitch took out his handkerchief and was supposed to exclaim, "My God, there's a hole in it!" He made that "My God, there's *no* hole in it," and got his laugh. I doubt that theatrical history can record a better instance of comic genius than Hitchy's singing "All Dressed Up and No Place to Go" in *The Beauty Shop*.

I have never doubted that Hitch was a little mad. (Aren't we all?) One of his abnormalities made him briefly a prisoner in the Tombs, where his popularity was as marked as elsewhere. An elderly man, who like Hitchy was awaiting trial, confided in the comedian that he was wretched because "tonight, for the first time in my life, I'm missing the Old Guard Ball in Brooklyn." Always sympathetic, Hitch repeated this to the warden and pleaded that his friend be paroled for the evening. "He won't try to escape,"

Hitchy said. "Why should he? Let him out for a few hours, and I guarantee that he'll come back."

The warden consented on condition that Hitch go along. "I know *you'll* come back," he declared. "You *couldn't* get away. Every child in the street would recognize you."

The two prisoners went to Brooklyn, where they enjoyed themselves so much that when they returned it was four o'clock in the morning and the jail doors were locked. This was serious, because Hitchy had pledged his word, and anyway neither skylarker had money enough for lodging elsewhere. Together they hammered and kicked at the doors until a passing patrolman arrested them for disorderly conduct. An hour or two later they were arraigned in Jefferson Market Court and sentenced to serve three days on Blackwell's Island. In a panic Hitchy kept making signs at the judge, who, finding his face vaguely familiar, invited both men to a conference in his chambers. There Hitchy announced, "You can't send us to Blackwell's Island because we're prisoners in the Tombs."

The Judge telephoned that celebrated resort, where the warden, worried to the verge of nervous prostration, breathed a sigh of relief before requesting that his charges be placed in a cab and sent home at once. Gravely, the magistrate returned to the bench, suspended sentence, and saw the pair safely on their way to the Tombs. Neither stayed there long. Hitchy's case, as I remember it, never even came to trial, and the experience had so little effect on his popularity that within a few months he was drawing crowds to the Astor Theater.

Wolf's Achilles' heel was an almost psychopathic weakness for women. Few true Broadwayites were indifferent to the other sex, and many of them had their matrimonial smashups, but Ren's flitting from flower to flower put to shame the most errant and industrious butterfly. His capacity for marrying the wrong women amounted to genius. This was partly because he had no desire for feminine companionship or interest in domestic virtues, and was allergic to intellect in women. "When I get home tired," he said, "I don't want to talk politics or discuss art." As was common on Broadway, Ren took pride in being seen in a public place—prefer-

ably an expensive one—with a pretty girl in a modish gown. He regarded my continued continence and devotion to a wife he thought plain and far too intellectual as mildly eccentric—in spite of which he was never more contented than when he spent a week or two under our roof.

When we met, Ren was the husband of Hope Booth, a flaxen-haired doll whose attractiveness had given her minor success on the stage, and whose mental endowment proved that Nature does *not* abhor a vacuum. Hope and I got on well, because I always treated her as though she were an explosive that might be ignited by a spark, but the couple lived a cat-and-dog life that ended in divorce. Shortly after, Ren married another actress, Harriet Raymond, who differed from Hope in that her hair was jet-black. Harriet was one of the most beautiful creatures I have ever seen, but, once again, the course of true love could hardly be described as smooth. Ren's flittings gave excuse for much of this, but like Hope Harriet could erupt without reasons discernible to a bystander. During our week in Buffalo with *My Best Girl*, which was desperately in need of alteration before being taken to New York the following Monday, a family dispute left me to attend rehearsals alone while Ren fought the thirty years' war in our rooms at the Iroquois Hotel.

Returning in the small hours one night, I found the door between us locked, and, thanking heaven for small mercies, fell asleep. An hour later Ren, in a long and very funny nightshirt, stood at the foot of my bed, saying, "For God's sake, wake up; Harriet's killed herself." Dazed, I followed him to the bathroom, where his wife—decorative even under these trying circumstances—lay lifelessly on the floor. "What happened?" I asked.

"We quarreled all night," Ren said, "and then she ran in here and took poison."

"What kind of poison?"

Ren held up the bottle. His hand was shaking, and the reddish fluid inside began to foam. Slowly it occurred to me that I had never heard of a poison that, being agitated slightly, acted like a beaker of beer. I took the bottle, tasted its contents, and my suspicions were confirmed. The fluid was a widely advertised dentifrice, and Harriet was faking. "We're on," I said; "Get up!" and

when she didn't, for the first and I hope the last time in my life, I smacked a lady's face.

Their final battle kept me out of bed three nights, and very nearly dynamited the production of our play, *A Perfect Lady*. Rose Stahl was the star of this comedy, and Rose had old-fashioned ideas of the sanctity, if not of the home, at least of the cast in which she was appearing. When Ren telephoned me one night that Harriet's detectives had found him in the company of a far-from-blessed damosel playing in support of Miss Stahl, something told me we were in for two-way trouble, and I was right. Most of the following day I sat behind a piece of scenery with the nominated co-respondent, trying to persuade her to resign before the cyclone struck. The lady wept copiously, and every few minutes one actor or another would pull away the painted canvas, find me imploring a hysterical female, and depart to spread the story of my obvious transgression. In the end I induced Harriet to bring suit without "naming names," and Ren was a chastened person—though, perhaps, not a chaste one—for several weeks.

After his death many years later, it was discovered that he had not altered an insurance policy that would have given Harriet an extremely large sum. However, she could not be found. Chatting with Arthur Garfield Hays, the celebrated fighter for civil liberties, on the beach at Havana, I learned that he knew her whereabouts, but some technicality had intervened and Harriet never got the money. I haven't seen her since the evening when, in the apartment they had shared, I besought her to let me carry a single change of linen to her sinful spouse.

With regard to this weakness, advice and reproof were as lost on Wolf as they would have been on a habitual drunkard. Ren would agree he had behaved badly, swear to live the life of an anchorite, and be involved in another affair before night. His money and influence brought Jeanne Eagels to stardom many seasons before her pyrotechnic achievement in *Rain*. Jeanne and he were famously fast friends for years, and then Ren and I went to Atlantic City with a *Ziegfeld Follies* and by Wednesday, whenever Miss Eagels phoned—which was frequently—Wolf would beg me to tell her he had gone to rehearsal. The following Sunday when we motored back to Broadway, Ren had found a new love in our

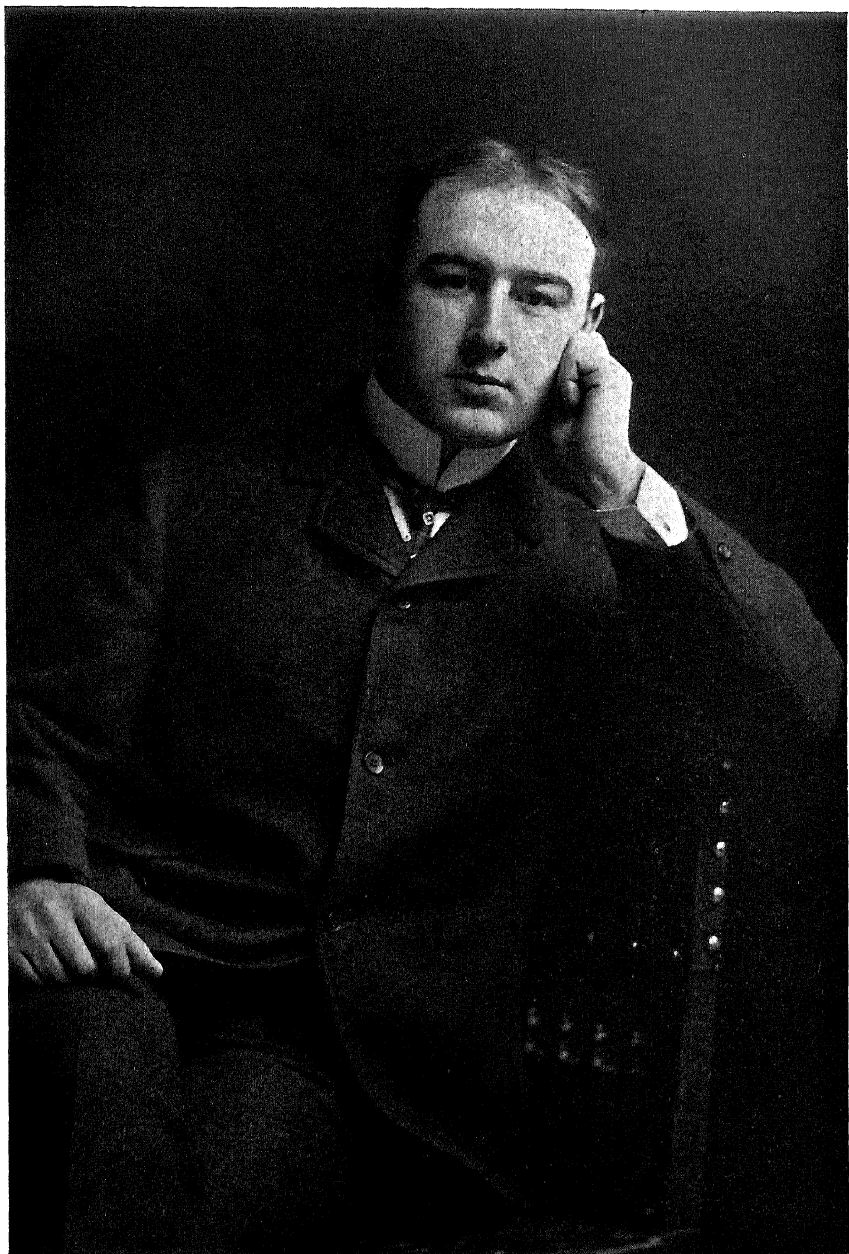


chorus and was going to marry her and send her boy through college. Before the end of that week he had forgotten her name, and when I asked about the marriage, inquired, "What on earth gave you that idea?"

Life with Ren was never dull, though I can't say that was one of my reasons for being devoted to him. As he often said, "Collaboration involves a relationship almost as intimate as marriage," and whether I liked it or not, I found myself continually involved in these violent love affairs which usually had violent ends. Because much of our work had to be done at night, Ren and I occupied adjoining rooms when we went on tour with a new piece, and I was constantly bumping into strange ladies who were "the real thing this time, Swede." Naturally, most of them were meretricious—not to say mercenary. Ren's earnings over this period were not less than half a million dollars, and probably a great deal more, but during the summer of 1920, while we were fishing in the Thousand Islands, I asked, "How much have you saved?" and he evaded answering. I believed the reason to be that a reply would have made my own nest egg seem small, but I was mistaken.

This particular trip was one of the grimmest I have ever made. Ren's health had been failing, and he walked with difficulty. In addition a lady he had loved an unusually long time had gone away to marry someone else. When we both were young, and I was on my honeymoon, Ren and my wife and I had enjoyed a blissful week in the Thousand Islands. Now a dying man, Ren was convinced that if we returned there we could recapture youth and happiness. Our period of collaboration had ended with *The Grass Widow*, our unsuccessful experiment with a serious story set to light music, and I was up to my neck in work on a new play when Ren phoned me at Shoreham to beg that I accompany him to Canada. I said I couldn't, and then when I had hung up my wife insisted that at whatever cost I mustn't fail a friend—so I called back, and met Ren that night in the Grand Central Station.

We were to travel alone together, and Ren had remembered every detail of our first vacation and tried to duplicate it. Returning then, we had enjoyed beer and sandwiches in the train—so Ren brought beer and sandwiches. Also he brought ten pounds of cherries, because he knew they were my favorite fruit. He had



RENNOLD WOLF

We collaborated on eight plays and there was never a contract between us.



To Channing Pollock -  
Friend, tho' collaborator  
From his fellow-criminal  
Avery Hopwood  
Feb. 17, 1905

AVERY HOPWOOD

The year after we produced "Clothes" and inscribed to "his fellow-criminal."

telegraphed for the same rooms we had occupied at Gananoque, but the inn had burned and we ended at Clayton. Anyway, going the same places and doing the same things could not make this the same holiday we had shared in 1906. Ren had to be lifted into and out of our boat, but he strove valiantly to conceal his disappointment in our vacation. "Now, this is living!" he would exclaim, while his face was contorted with pain.

Shortly after our return Wolf begged me to take off his hands his apartment at the Belnord. I did so, believing his explanation that it was too big for a man who lived alone, and never suspecting that he lacked means to pay the rent. After all we had divided a fortune that seemed large to have been exhausted by the most persistent gold diggers. Ren took up his abode with the latest charmer in a cheap boardinghouse, and since he was writing a musical comedy and I a melodrama, we saw little of each other. I had no idea that what he wrote was fit only for the wastebasket, that even his column for the *Telegraph* was prepared by his editor, Irving Lewis, who followed Wolf's copy as closely as possible to prevent his suspecting the truth. One day a mutual friend told me that Ren had refused to see a physician, and urged that I compel him to do so.

I telephoned, and went to Ren's room where he received me in sullen silence. When I had spoken my piece, he said, "It's no use, Swede. I know what's the matter with me, and it has been the matter since I was nineteen years old. I thought I had it licked, but it waited until I had success and everything else worth while in my grasp, and then it leaped back at me. I haven't a chance on earth, and the kindest thing you can do is to leave me alone."

Discussing the case with a celebrated specialist, and without identifying the victim, I learned that the astonishing thing I had heard for the first time was even less than the whole truth. "That passion for women," he said, "has been the effect of a breakdown of inhibition due to the disease." I tried to persuade Ren to join his mother in Ithaca, and when he refused, telephoned her to suggest that she spend the Christmas holidays with him. A few nights afterward, when I had retired, my own phone rang, and I picked up the receiver to hear a strangled voice crying, "Swede! Swede!" That was all. When I reached the boardinghouse, Ren

had been dead fifteen minutes. "He called you," his mother said, "and then started for the bathroom and collapsed on the way."

That night as I sat beside the body of my friend, his mother, Alice Wolf, told me he hadn't left enough money to bury him. After the funeral, at which a bit of pneumonia I contracted plowing through a blizzard to Ren prevented my speaking, as he had wished, Alice and I and a court officer opened his safe-deposit box at the Harriman National Bank. The box was so packed that our united efforts hardly more than availed to draw it from its recess. "You were wrong, Alice," I said to Mrs. Wolf. "I know what's in here; I've seen it often in past years. You'll find that Ren was a comparatively rich man."

Again *I* was wrong. There wasn't a share of stock in that box, or a bond, or even a contract. What filled it to bursting was love letters—hundreds of love letters, tied in little bundles, each bearing a different woman's name.

## FOOLING WITH THE FOLLIES

THE GRASS WIDOW was my swan song as a librettist with Rennold Wolf. It was written during the winter of 1914-1915, half a dozen years before his death, but, because it represented an innovation was some time finding a manager, and brought our business association to an end late in 1917. We had begun work on the *Ziegfeld Follies* of 1915 when James K. Hackett expressed interest in the *Widow*, and suggested that Ren and I dine with him and then read the piece.

At low ebb in his finances Hackett had inherited a large fortune from an elderly female relative who disliked him cordially but was legally incompetent to make a will. As next of kin Jim fell heir to the estate, and immediately gave a dinner at which each of his creditors found a check for the amount due under his plate. Jim then purchased adjoining houses in West Seventy-first Street, knocked down the walls between them, and created a luxurious residence.

Wolf, who had another dinner engagement, was to join us later, but I reached the new dwelling at the appointed hour and was ushered into the music room. Neither Hackett nor his wife, Beatrice Beckley, was at home, the butler said; would I wait?

That was at seven o'clock, and about 7:30 the butler returned to announce that Hackett had telephoned to apologize for being late and to ask would I have a cocktail. I would and did. At 7:45 the butler reappeared; Jim had phoned again to ask would I have another cocktail. Again I obliged. Beatrice came in shortly after eight. She was surprised by my presence, not having been told that she was to expect a guest for dinner, but would I have a cocktail? We drank together and were chatting when Jim arrived with three

friends, at 8:30, to insist that we must have cocktails. While we were having them, Wolf appeared, having finished *his* dinner, and, by nine, the party was seated at Jim's heavily laden board.

Ren and I had promised to meet Ziegfeld and Victor Herbert at 11:30, but rising from the table at ten, we thought we might just possibly hop, skip and jump through *The Grass Widow*. Hackett was determined that first we must inspect his new home. He touched a button, the butler responded, and Jim instructed him to follow us about with a portable bar. The procession started, and in every room halted for a drink. At 10:30 I told Jim the reading must be postponed, and why. "Nonsense!" he exclaimed, and touched another button that brought a secretary. "Take a letter," Jim said. "Dear Mr. Ziegfeld: Mr. Pollock and Mr. Wolf have been detained by Mr. Hackett, who presents his compliments and begs that you and Mr. Herbert join us. The bearer has a car that is at your disposal, and we shall be delighted to see you at the earliest possible moment."

Before the secretary could unfold his notebook and read this to an astonished manager and two composers awaiting their librettists in an office in the New Amsterdam Theater, the seven of us at Jim's had been seated at what looked like a directors' table in a huge library. "Now," said Hackett, "go on, and let's hear the play." I had read three pages when Jim pounded the table and announced, "That's enough! It's great! I'll produce the piece!" Ren and I protested that he didn't know what it was about, and Hackett was proving us wrong by predicting that the tenor would win the soprano, when Ziegfeld arrived with Victor Herbert, Gene Buck and Lou Hirsch who had composed the score of *The Grass Widow* and was working with us on the *Follies*. "I've bought your opera," Hackett told Hirsch; "come on down and play the music for us."

Lou's fingers had hardly touched the piano keys when Jim suggested to me that we retire to discuss terms. A bit dazed, I followed Jim to the basement which he had turned into an enormous smoking room. Once there, my host asked, "Did you ever see me do my Spanish dances?"

"No," I answered, "and I don't want to."

"Don't be silly!" Jim exclaimed. "I'm as graceful as a girl!"

He started a phonograph, attached to his hands a pair of castanets and began. Just over our heads, Lou was banging out a marching song. Below, Jim's phonograph purred something languorous and alluring, while Jim, an inch or two over six feet tall, and built like a prize fighter, cavorted over the length and breadth of his teak-wood smoking room. He *was* graceful, and quite sober, but as wild a man as I ever met.

It was two in the morning when we joined the company in the music room, and Jim said, "I'm tired, and Beatrice and I are going to leave you, but supper is served in the games room and we shall be hurt if you don't stay for it." We stayed chiefly, I think, because the whole adventure was so incredible that we wanted to see it through. "Supper" was a veritable barbecue. Ren and I left Jim's home at daybreak, and he never mentioned *The Grass Widow* again. The piece was presented by Madison Corey in 1917 and survived only a few weeks. It had a capital dramatic story that lent itself uncommonly well to the delightful score by Lou Hirsch—except for De Koven's, the best score Ren and I had ever had. Our failure was due mainly to George Marion and a poor management. George's performance of the principal role was so fine, so moving and deeply tragic, that it immeasurably widened any possible gulf between light music and a serious libretto. As to the second misfortune, every experienced author knows that a bad play with a good management has a better chance of success than a good play with a bad management. This fact always comes to my mind when my radical friends talk of the "capitalists" as though only their money played a part in the prosperity of their enterprises.

As to this, there could be no better example than Ziegfeld's guiding hand on the *Follies*. Until his death, this series of revues was the most distinguished that had ever been witnessed, or, I think, ever will be. None of Europe's famous shows at the Folies-Bergère or the Casino de Paris, in Paris, or at Ronacher's, in Vienna, compared with it. Flo ate, drank and slept *Follies*. Strolling with him, I have seen Flo stop short at a shop window displaying a picture post card that suggested a costume or a number. Several *Follies* represented investments close to a quarter of a million dollars each.



Capacity business throughout the year's limit of their existence could not repay this sum, plus enormous operating expenses, and Ziegfeld knew this but didn't care. Every season he enlisted the best available scene and costume designers, authors, composers and performers, and many of these were developed under his direction. Joseph Urban, the kindly giant who had built the Khedive's palace at Cairo, was lured from the Metropolitan Opera House to make "Urban blue" famous, and to paint the most beautiful stage settings ever seen in the world. Ziegfeld was not only magnificent; he had taste and the ability to employ talent to its greatest advantage.

Always Ren Wolf's major ambition had been to write a *Ziegfeld Follies*. Many, if not most of these had been furnished by Harry B. Smith. We envied Harry because his job was so easy and so distinguished, and were sorry for him, too, because we were going to show him up. Smith had been kind to us, and it seemed ungrateful to dash off a revue that would make his look cheap and shabby, but Ren was determined and persuaded me. The day the newspapers announced our contract with Ziegfeld, we passed Harry Smith in the street and thought there was bitterness in his smile. I know now it was pity.

That night Ren and I sketched a scenario. Our *Follies* wasn't going to be the usual riot of disconnected scenes, but an orderly procession of whimsical fancies, starting from a definite theme, marching toward a predetermined objective, and taking two hours to pass a given point. We were going to be witty, and satirical, and as funny as it was possible to be without cluttering up the theater with prostrate auditors in convulsions of merriment. We took our ideas to Ziegfeld, who dispatched a secretary and two stenographers to bring in a few of his own. They were tied in parcels, and, believe it or not, must have weighed about a hundred pounds. We inspected these and met Gene Buck, who in years had never been more than nine or ten feet away from Ziegfeld. Gene was graduated from a Jesuit College and became first an illustrator, then an author of popular songs, and finally the handy man of the *Follies*. *Hamlet* without Hamlet would have been a perfect and complete thing compared to a *Follies* without Gene Buck. Afterward Gene founded the American Society of Composers, Au-

thors and Publishers and incurred the undying enmity of the radio moguls by compelling them to pay for the music that made their fortunes, but in 1915 Buck was a slim, enthusiastic youth, and the most generous and helpful collaborator one could hope to find.

Gene and Ren and I chaperoned Ziegfeld's hundred pounds of ideas to my study, and within a few hours had produced a schedule for twenty scenes, fully described in about sixty pages—or at least a dozen more than were required for the entire libretto as acted eventually. Flo telephoned us nine times during the evening. As you know, I had got used to this sort of bombardment while I was press agent for Anna Held. Besides his offices in the New Amsterdam and a mansion on the Hudson, Flo occupied almost an entire floor at the Ansonia Hotel, and most of the furniture consisted of telephones. Flo has called me at four in the morning to inquire what I was doing. His telephone bills must have been enormous, but Flo never worried about bills. When he could pay them and remembered to do so, he did, but there was no certainty. Once after he had driven me, in three different limousines with as many different liveried chauffeurs, to his rural palace with its marble swimming pool, I heard his secretary at an office telephone assuring the butcher that three frying chickens would be paid for C. O. D. On another occasion, in his apartment at the Ansonia, Flo hastily left a group of us who were planning to spend \$200,000 of his money, and someone explained that he was avoiding a summons in a suit involving \$112 due his haberdasher.

In competition with a colored orchestra and forty young women who were declaring harmoniously that they wanted someone to make a fuss over them, we read our schedule to Flo, and it was accepted with enthusiasm. Two days later Ziegfeld had commissioned Urban to paint a dozen scenes that were *not* in the schedule, and we were pledged to write a few pages of hilariously comic dialogue to fit them. None of these scenes had anything to do with our scenario. We were dealing with Rip Van Winkle, and didn't quite see how we were to get him into a submarine and then into an airplane, but Flo said chronology wasn't important and proved to be right. Our greatest difficulty was that the submarine was only ten feet long and four feet high; there wasn't room to stand in it, or to sit up straight, and both inmates were to be in the dark, be-

hind several pieces of gauze, three yards back of the footlights. How to make even Bert Williams and Leon Errol funny under these circumstances was a problem solved, after we had submitted thirteen versions of the incident, by taking both comedians out of the vessel and substituting a new plot. This plot abandoned Rip Van Winkle and concerned a tenor who had been vainly seeking a contented woman on earth, and in the air and sea. Because of its very spaciousness quite a lot of plot still remained when we got to New York.

About this time Flo further complicated matters by engaging Annette Kellermann, the diving beauty, and instructing us to write a part for her. Miss Kellermann owed her fame to parts we *couldn't* write, but we did our best, and at a cost approaching \$25,000 Joe Urban constructed a Roman bath with a tank for diving. When everything was ready Ziegfeld decided that he had never really wanted a diver, and we were asked to alter her role, which had been silent, so it would fit Ina Claire, who had made a hit by her eloquence in *The Quaker Girl*. Ren and I sat up all one night writing a song for Miss Claire, which at dawn seemed far too naughty. We consigned it to the wastebasket, from which it was rescued by my young daughter who didn't think it naughty at all. The song, "Marie Odile," was *the* outstanding success of that season's *Follies*. Ina sent me a photograph of herself in character, inscribed "To my lifesaver," and ten years afterward Ziegfeld wrote me about "the best lyric I ever had in my life—'Marie Odile.'"

With Ina Claire *in* and Annette Kellermann *out*, the Roman bath became an Oriental harem, or Elysium, or something, and what to do with our new prima donna was a consideration involving scene painters, costumers and composers. Conference became the business of our lives. We conferred at any hour after midnight, and everywhere except in our studies. There was no time to write, and when we *did* write the engagement of another comedian or an unexpected twist in world affairs compelled us to rewrite all we had written. Wolf's ambition had been to write a book for the *Follies*. We wrote one the size of *Webster's Dictionary*, and then tore it up and turned out the equivalent of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. We wrote a library, and produced a pamphlet. Every-

body suggested things that everybody liked, and before we'd got them half done everybody had forgotten them and thought of something else. William C. Fields, the juggler now so popular in motion pictures, was acquired at the last moment. We were told Bill couldn't speak a line but had been promised a part, and we must provide one that would be silent but sidesplitting. Bill is really a great comedian, and in the end he made most of his own opportunities. That *Follies* was full of great comedians, including three of the greatest—Leon Errol, Ed Wynn and Bert Williams, the third a Negro and inimitable. Use of that last word reminds me that one evening, seeking amusement, a dozen of us went to a burlesque theater in the Bowery, where Bert appeared on the stage as an amateur giving an imitation of Bert Williams—and was a complete flop.

Ed Wynn's engagement affords evidence of the fact that in all this chaos there remained the genius and guiding hand of Ziegfeld. Wolf and I had furnished a skit called "Commotion Picture" in which a comedian in the auditorium was to direct figures on the screen that followed his every instruction. Flo insisted this required drollery of a kind our cast couldn't supply, so we began haunting vaudeville performances. Ed Wynn was at the Palace in a sketch entitled "The Perfect Fool," and while we were still in the lobby Flo heard his voice and said, "That's our man." The movie had to be carefully made, of course, and accurately timed. For this work all of us went to a studio at Fort Lee, New Jersey, one morning at seven. Most of the group were chorus girls whose only chance of appearing at that hour was to stay up all night. One of these chorus girls was Mae Murray, who "screened" so well that "Commotion Picture" took her to brief fame and fortune in Hollywood.

Ziegfeld's "glorified girls" were celebrated, of course, and I apologize for having alluded to them as "the chorus." Each had something individual to do, if it was only to strut across the stage in some breath-taking costume. It wasn't what they revealed that made these frocks breath-taking: Flo never went in for nudity and I don't recall that an objectionable line was ever spoken in one of his shows. Chorus girls in those days received an average of about \$30 a week; Ziegfeld paid his beauties as much as \$125.

They came from all over the country, endowed, for the most part, with everything but brains, and they were taught to walk and move in a fashion peculiar to the *Follies*. Three or four of the girls in our show went on to stability, or death. Justine Johnstone married Walter Wanger, the movie producer, and then—of all things!—turned to chemistry. Lilyan Tashman became the wife of Edmund Lowe, the film star, and herself a notable in pictures. Olive Thomas, one of our two outstanding beauties, married Mary Pickford's brother Jack, killed herself in Paris and was buried from St. Thomas' Church, New York, in a casket covered with a blanket of orchids. Kay Laurell, the second outstanding beauty, became a fairly successful actress. Most of these haughty ladies were frankly contemptuous of mere authors and composers, but Kay afterward played a minor but interesting part in my life.

Early in May we were rehearsing on the roof of the New Amsterdam Theater when Gene Buck, who had been breakfasting with a newspaper friend, whispered to me, "There's a report that the *Lusitania* has been torpedoed and lost, with more than a thousand of her passengers." I was particularly shocked because several of these were close friends of mine. I had talked with Charles Klein, the dramatist, the day before his sailing, and less than a week before had shared pie and milk at a quick-lunch counter with Charles Frohman. Frohman's drowning brought about a persistent legend. A minor actress who survived the disaster gave an interview in which she reported herself standing beside C. F. as the ship went down; his last words were "Why fear death? It is the most beautiful adventure in life." This is approximately a sentence in *Peter Pan*, and Frohman *may* have repeated it, but I could as readily believe that he recited the multiplication table. C. F. was an extremely mundane person, without interest in poetry and with a very marked interest in his own well-being. Whatever the truth of the story, it has become history, and I have found it in the most respectable books of reference.

Rehearsals of the *Follies* were like rehearsals of the Folies-Bergère, or any other big musical show, only more so. Tired, red-eyed and sweaty beauties in pajamas or knickerbockers or practice costumes improvised by pinning up or taking off a skirt, tried dance

steps on the stage, while mermaids suspended by piano wires floated above their heads. Comedians rehearsed skits in the lobbies, shouting their lines in order to be heard above the din of manhandled pianos. Every now and then one of them would come to us to ask, "Wouldn't this be a good place for a funny line?"—as though funny lines were picked from an author's inner consciousness like fruit from a tree. By this time nothing remained of our original manuscript, or of the manuscript that followed the original, or of the manuscript that followed the manuscript that followed the original. Like a best-seller, we had reached our seventeenth or eighteenth edition. Sometimes Ren and I ate, and occasionally we slept, and once, I seem to remember, we both shaved. If and when we did go to bed, Flo invariably got us up, by phone, to demand that we write a song he had forgotten next day and that nobody ever read. I had written so many songs within a few weeks that scanning became habitual, and shocked at the number of words in a telegram I was sending from Atlantic City, I discovered that I had been counting *syllables*!

Our final dress rehearsal in that gay resort lasted nearly twenty-four hours. Ren and I had planned a march of the sovereigns of the world; it was a sad memory by midnight, with the German Kaiser asleep in the arms of the Sultan of Turkey, the President of France draped across the rail of a box, and the Dove of Peace sharing a bottle of sarsaparilla with the United States Navy. Two hours after leaving the theater we were back for a first performance. How our comedians fought for every laugh! How the chorus danced and marched and maneuvered, between climbings of countless stairs for innumerable changes of costume! Nobody could have suspected the agile Leon Errol of a dislocated hip and a bandaged ankle, or that our smiling show girls weren't fresh from downy pillows and perfumed baths. Many years later I dedicated a novel to "the army of the old theater—in its way, as gallant as any army that ever fought in France."

The tryout week in Atlantic City provided little letup, though there were a few "parties" given by regular *Follies* first-nighters from New York. Many of these visitors had never missed a Ziegfeld opening. The most interesting was "Diamond Jim" Brady, since then, I believe, the hero of a motion-picture story and always

the subject of legends as invincible as that of Frohman's last words.

So far as I know, "Diamond Jim" never wore more than one or two diamonds at the same time. He was a mountain of a man, gross in appearance, but far from being a flashy dresser. He may have owned, and probably did own a quantity of jewelry, though not nearly so much as I have seen pictured upon his façade. Brady's profligacy, too, has been absurdly exaggerated. Jim liked the companionship of the girls and being seen in their company; he would provide them with countless dinners or suppers, and once I saw him on the Board Walk buying dolls for a score of our most sophisticated beauties, but Brady was too busy and responsible an executive to be dissipated. After all, "Diamond Jim" was president of one of the biggest corporations in America. He never touched alcoholic beverages, but he could, and did, consume quarts of orange juice at a sitting, and I have seen him eat thirty-six oysters before getting down to the solid part of a luncheon. Once Ziegfeld duplicated Jim's menu, always instructing the waiter "the same for me," and slipping the food into an empty wine bucket. Afterward Flo admonished, "Look, Jim; *that's* what you have in your stomach." The warning was of no avail; Brady died of an intestinal ailment at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, the great English dramatist, owed one of his most striking scenes to a legend of "Diamond Jim." Brady, the story ran, had built and elaborately decorated and furnished a home for a well-known show girl, and then learned that she had another lover. Within a few hours he had sent a wrecking crew to the house, and its occupant, whose first name was Edna, returned from the theater to find her smashed chairs and tables in a heap covered with plaster torn from the walls and brass pipe that had been plumbing. Originally I heard this tale from Lillian Russell, and it may or may not have been true, but on Pinero's own word it suggested the last ten minutes of *Iris*, in which Maldonado wreaks the same vengeance upon his faithless lady.

The *Follies* of 1915 was generally voted the best of the series, but I had had enough of musical shows, and with the subsequent production of *The Grass Widow* I bowed out. Wolf, I think, was as well pleased. He had learned his trade and tried his wings suc-

cessfully, and unaided, he completed a very prosperous musical comedy, *The Rainbow Girl*, before his disintegration and death. To my own vast surprise, I was to write one more *Follies* for Ziegfeld—that of 1921. I had been holidaying in Paris where Gilbert Miller had asked me to recommend to Flo a team of dancers at the Folies-Bergère. Keeping this promise, I went to Flo's office in New York and encountered a frantic impresario. Willard Mack, author of many successful plays, had contracted to deliver the book of that season's show, and had failed to do so. "We begin rehearsals next Monday," Ziegfeld announced, "and I haven't anything to rehearse. Be a pal and help me out."

I said I wouldn't write another *Follies*, because "it's hell."

Ziegfeld asked, "What'll you take for six weeks of hell?"

At the Casino de Paris in Paris I had heard Mistinguett sing what seemed to me a very remarkable ballad, and I suggested this to Flo. Because of it he engaged Fannie Brice, who scored an enduring hit with the song, which was called "My Man." I had made an almost literal translation of the lyric on my way home, and finding it impossible, had written completely new verses with the original theme. However, our only score was for piano, and when the number failed in Atlantic City Victor Herbert blamed the orchestration and volunteered to make a new one "if you've a pitcher of beer in your room." All night we sat over that pitcher of beer, and, at eight in the morning, Victor demonstrated the result for me on his 'cello. It was a quite different song. "Victor," I exclaimed, "you're a great musician."

Victor cocked one sleepy eye. "Don't kid the old gentleman," he answered. "I'm a good tunesmith. Six months after I'm dead no one will remember my name."

He meant it, too, and now, nearly a quarter of a century after his passing, I never hear Herbert's compositions at concerts or over the radio without recalling his mistaken estimate of himself. Victor Herbert, I think, is one of our immortals. He had a gift of melody unequalled in our time, and he was one of the simplest and most charming companions who ever lived. For the *Follies* of 1921, Victor and I toiled on a Terpsichorean drama that went into the discard because we could find no dancer who could act. So far as I know, this score is the only unpublished work of the master.



For Fannie Brice I wrote a burlesque of *Camille* that included what Edna Ferber recently described as the "deathless line," "I know I have been a bad woman—but awfully good company." This burlesque enlisted Miss Brice, William C. Fields and Raymond Hitchcock, and concluded with their rendering of "Lionel, Ethel and Jack." The song poked good-natured fun at the Barrymores, and I was astonished one evening at a rehearsal when Ziegfeld told me we'd have to cut it out. Somebody had informed Miss Barrymore that the lyric was offensive, and weeping, she had called to protest. I had the number performed for her, and she withdrew her objection.

Hitchcock was down on his luck, and I had induced Ziegfeld to engage him for the *Follies*. By this time Hitchy's eccentricities were more marked than ever, and though always friendly he proved difficult. I wrote for him the song, "If Plymouth Rock Had Landed on the Pilgrims Instead of the Pilgrims Landing on the Rock," but never could persuade him to listen to it. When Ziegfeld insisted, Hitchy invited the composer, Dave Stamper, and me to dine at his home, and then teach him the number. When we finished the meal Hitchy asked, "Did either of you ever hear me play the slide trombone?"

"No," I replied, "and the worst of it is that we're never going to."

"You're making a mistake," Hitchy declared, and tooted the instrument for us until after midnight, when we left him still in ignorance of our words and music. Ziegfeld was angry, and Hitchy read the song from a slip of paper at the first-night performance, in spite of which it was a success.

In general my "six weeks of hell" closely resembled those of 1915. I recall a dress rehearsal in Atlantic City with James Reynolds, the costume designer, sobbing on my shoulder, and a wholly naked woman—the dancer we had brought from Paris at the request of Gilbert Miller—springing from the stage and waking me from a sound sleep to complain in an outpouring of strangled French that Ziegfeld insisted upon her wearing something. Flo was still Flo. Refreshing my memory a moment ago by reading the program on my screen, I discovered for the first time a joke he perpetrated on me eighteen years ago. The cast of characters for an Arabian skit

credits the impersonation of a litter bearer to "Channing Pollocko." Not all Flo's jokes were as amusing. After successfully begging me to "be a pal and help me out," he retained the final sum due me—several hundred dollars—insisting that I had borrowed it from him "one afternoon on the Board Walk." For what, even Ziegfeld couldn't guess! It was the same season, I think, that Flo paid an immense sum for an ermine coat that was a birthday gift to his infant daughter, Patricia. When the *Follies* had been triumphantly running several months in the Globe Theater, I sailed to produce a play in London, and Ziegfeld radioed me to the steamer, "You are walking out on your job, and unless you return by next boat I will take appropriate legal action." He didn't, of course, and when I saw him again, he had forgotten both the message and the retained royalty. He was a pleasant fellow, nevertheless, and a great artist—peace to his ashes!

The *Follies* of 1921 was a sort of encore to the "swan song as a librettist" mentioned in my first paragraph. I had exchanged what should have been the most important years of my life for a good deal of money and a certain amount of experience in writing comedy. My contribution to the art of Gilbert and Sullivan was precisely nil. We all make mistakes, but I was nearing forty when *The Grass Widow* was produced, and hadn't much time to spare.

## AUTHORS IN BLUNDERLAND

THE question of what is enough money always reminds me of the bibulous gentleman who was asked, "When you've had enough whisky, why don't you say 'Sarsaparilla?'" and replied, "When I've had enough whisky, I *can't* say 'Sarsaparilla.'" It isn't that most of us wish for opulence, or to be "the richest man in the cemetery," but with every approach to the ample our needs are amplified, too, and our goal recedes like a mirage in the desert. There is no greater fallacy than charges or taxes based upon "ability to pay," since, as these and wants multiply, the ability decreases.

When I earned \$15 a week, all my friends were persons who earned about the same sum, and whose tastes and ideas of what was proper were similarly limited. I could give one of them a fifty-cent table-d'hôte dinner, or invite him to pay for his own dinner, without his being astonished. When I earned \$50, my associates earned \$50, and the meal they required, and to which we were accustomed, cost more. An author of standing cannot ask other authors of standing, or publishers, or managers or any of the kind of people with whom his lot is cast, to dine with him in a dairy lunchroom. This is not snobbishness, unless it be snobbish for a steel puddler who has become president of the company to discard his overalls and wear a business suit to the office. As income alters, so do one's personal relations, and wants and surroundings. In many respects, this is as unfortunate as it is unavoidable.

After my marriage I had set my mark for security at \$50,000, which then produced about \$3,000 a year—wholly sufficient for our needs. In the very process of earning and saving the \$50,000, we made a different sort of friends and acquaintances, taught them

and others to expect more of us, and ourselves greater indulgence. My \$50,000 became double that amount after production of *The Red Widow*, but by then I had acquired—and required—attorneys, a secretary, and a home in the country. The locust posts had vanished from beneath that home, and a cement cellar had taken their place. The sand and beach plum had given way to lawns and gardens. The ten-foot dining room, somewhat extended, had become a sleeping chamber for our hitherto nonexistent cook, and a new wing provided a dining room and a breakfast porch and separate chambers for my wife and myself. Friends who knew we had a country place expected to be, as we wanted them to be, invited for week ends, and that meant guest rooms, and more than the single bath that, on Saturdays and Sundays, had a waiting list like the Union League Club. All this expansion was natural and normal, responsive to one of the urges that makes for achievement, but all of it constituted hostages to fortune.

Natural and normal, too, for an author, but outrageous, nevertheless, was the suit alleging plagiarism that, at this time, ended in complete exoneration—and fees and expenses that made a deep dent in my capital. Successful authors who have been found guilty of “cribbing” can be counted on the fingers of one hand, but sooner or later almost every successful author is accused of it. As already stated I have in my files more notes for material than I could use in treble my lifetime, and I add to the number every day. The majority of trained observers and writers are as well supplied; most of them could buy what they are charged with pilfering at a tenth the cost of legal action, and reject offers of collaboration at the rate of at least two or three a week. Practically everything they are charged with stealing is utterly worthless, puerile compositions that never find a publisher or producer. Nevertheless, every year brings its crop of these lawsuits, ending in a verdict for the defendant and yet frequently in his ruin. Richard Walton Tully was bankrupted by winning the case involving his *Bird of Paradise*, and so crushed that he wrote very little afterward.

The plaintiffs usually may be divided into two classes: First, the tyros so ignorant of literature that having written “I love you,” they are convinced that anyone else who writes “I love you” must have robbed them. Second, the blackmailers who if they weren’t

alleging plagiarism would be standing in the street, hoping to be struck by a motor car, so that they could sue for damages. Both classes find lawyers ready to take their cases on a contingent fee, and for the publicity. Thus, they risk nothing and hope to gain fortunes. The second of my experiences, involving *The Fool*, went to the United States Supreme Court, and besides an enormous amount of time and effort, cost me about \$25,000. Deciding in my favor, each of the courts awarded me counsel fees, after which the plaintiff went into bankruptcy, leaving me without a chance to collect.

My first suit, brought on account of *The Beauty Shop*, in which Raymond Hitchcock starred in 1914, had the effect of a blow in the face. No one who has conducted himself scrupulously, and established himself as a reputable citizen can ever relish being publicly branded a thief, but the shock is less when he has learned that this happens to all his fellows, and in proportion to their repute and distinction. In my case, too, the financial considerations were weighty. I had only just paid the indebtedness incurred through the illness of my stepfather, "got out of the red," married, built a home and begun putting aside for a rainy day. Here was an unexpected and, for me, unpredictable downpour, threatening to wash away years of industry and thrift and to leave me just where I was before those years began.

*The Beauty Shop* action was brought by Philander Johnson, a columnist for the *Washington Star*, on account of an unproduced play of his I had never seen, and the name of which I have forgotten. The alleged similarities between the two works were of the usual sort—both mentioned Lillian Russell, and both had scenes on a seacoast. To convince an upright judge not too well versed in these matters that scenes on seacoasts were not so unprecedented as to be proof of theft, we introduced in evidence about a hundred flashlight photographs of seacoasts in earlier works. The dramatic moment of this trial occurred when, on the witness stand, I pointed out that *The Beauty Shop* was far less like Johnson's piece than Johnson's piece was like *Pinafore*. As I recited that bill of particulars Johnson, overcome, rose and left the courtroom. There isn't the slightest chance that Johnson had pilfered from *Pinafore*. I think that, after bringing this action, he became aware of the simi-

larities, and was panic-stricken when he found we had discovered them. This trial dragged on for weeks and required our taking a dozen witnesses to Washington at the cost of their time and our money. After several months the judge decided there was no evidence that we had previously seen, or heard of Johnson's master-work and that his honor could not imagine two pieces less alike. Having established what everyone knew in the beginning, that we were not thieves, Ren Wolf and I paid the bills and started afresh.

It was at this juncture that the serpent invaded our Eden. The serpent's name was R. L. Giffen; he was, and is, my friend, and an agent for authors dealing with the movie magnates. Larry had followed me to Shoreham and bought the house originally owned by Grace Isabel Colbron. If Wolf and I were disturbed as to finances, he said, why not pick a few of the golden apples of Hollywood? Why waste weeks or months shaping stories for magazines or the stage, when you could call in your stenographer, dictate a rough outline, and buy a racing stable with the proceeds? In comparison, taking candy from children seemed tedious and exhausting labor. All we required for immediate wealth was enough paper, enough stenographers and a delivery truck. Larry asked, "Does what I say sound like sense?"

"To me," Ren murmured, "it sounds like celestial music."

Every year we had lived up to that moment, the serpent insisted, had been a year wasted. "Of course, I know how little you care for money, but every man has a duty to his family. You can write a story a week, and I can get you \$3,000 a story. That's \$150,000 a year, and two weeks to spend yachting in the Mediterranean."

"Give me air!" I gasped. "Give me air—when you can get around to it—but first give me a stenographer!"

Our first contract stipulated that we were to provide the old Metro Company with ten stories at \$1,600 each. The fly in the amber was that the film philanthropist who signed this contract could reject as many stories as he pleased, and, as the agreement remained in force until he had *accepted* ten, he had only to sit back comfortably and decline everything we sent him to acquire indefinite control of our output at no expense whatever. We might have

written our hands off, and still be writing, for Metro without completing our task or earning a penny. We telephoned the philanthropist, and he said there had been an oversight somewhere, but as we couldn't see anything he had overlooked, we stopped haggling about details and went to work.

The first story submitted was a little thing of my own, prophetically entitled *The Come-Back*. The philanthropist said it had no dramatic merit, and wasn't worth \$1,600. After that story, salvaged in my play, *The Sign on the Door*, had run a year each in New York and London, and had been witnessed in almost every capital of Europe, another film company paid \$100,000 for it. Wolf and I were producing at least one musical comedy a year, but all our spare time went to Metro. The philanthropist, whose name was Max Karger, once summoned me from Shoreham to ask whether I could write a tale around the destruction of a city. Metro had built a city at Brighton Beach for *Romeo and Juliet*, and it occurred to Max that he could get another picture out of its demolition. I slaved for weeks on that yarn, and when I had sent it in, Max phoned to remark, "It's a great story, but you must be crazy. We'd have to build a whole city to film it."

"You've got a city," I said.

"What *are* you talking about?"

"You've got the city you built for *Romeo and Juliet*. I wrote this damned stuff so you could make another picture while you were tearing down the buildings."

"Gosh!" Max exclaimed. "That's right! I forgot to tell you that the day after you were here I found that city had been wrecked by the subway contractors."

I still have on hand a perfectly good movie manuscript no one will buy because its production requires building a city.

All our relations with Metro were like that. After a few months the company accepted one story and produced it, with Lionel Barrymore, under the title of *His Father's Son*. By that time, however, Max was angry with me for chiding him because he kept the elderly and famous English dramatist, Haddon Chambers, sitting on a staircase an hour beyond the time set for a meeting. The press agent of Metro asked me to send him a manuscript of *His Father's Son* for publicity purposes, and by mistake the story was delivered

to Karger, who, wishing to rebuke me, declined it in a note declaring, "This is cheap stuff, and nobody could make a picture of it." Metro had made the picture, and it was running successfully at the Rialto Theater! However, in filmdom only a clairvoyant parent could know his own child. One of my stories, a harmless trifle called *My Lady of Laughter* and produced by another company as *The Evil Thereof*, roused the ire of numerous religious groups, and, finally, witnessing the performance, I found that my heroine, a child of the South who got into theatrical life in New York, had become the Eurasian mistress of a brothel in Hong Kong. The movie magnates were proud of the fact that no author ever recognized his own work after it left their hands, and I still wonder why fabulous prices are paid to distinguished writers for material that is then turned over to a staff of third-rate hacks. This seems a little like buying the Venus de Milo because you want the stone to build an icehouse!

At the end of two years Wolf and I had submitted some forty stories to Metro, and still owed them two of the ten stipulated in our contract. Most of the rejected manuscripts had been sold elsewhere, but our names remained conspicuously absent from lists of people yachting in the Mediterranean. Since then, my traffic with the movie makers has been confined chiefly to plays previously presented on Broadway. Of thirty-one of these, all but the best, and those best adapted to the screen, have been purchased and filmed—several of them repeatedly. Avery Hopwood and I sold *Clothes* to Famous Players. When it was released, with the climax that originally recommended it omitted, we wrote another movie around this climax, and sold *that*. The other movie was produced without the scene in question, so we continued the process. Finally, by some accident, one of the stories was used *with* the climax, thus depriving Hopwood and myself of what promised to be an income for life.

These minor incidents from ancient history are recorded here only because they seem amusing, and are part of my past. Someone remarked that "Life is a comedy to those who think; a tragedy to those who feel," and I never had any *feeling* about the films. When Sam Goldwyn bought the movie rights in my *Roads of Destiny*, I explained to him why the story required careful and



expert treatment, and offered, at no cost to him except traveling expenses, to spend a month with his staff in Hollywood. Sam apparently thought I wanted a vacation at his expense, and I heard no more of the proposal. Less than a week before my sailing for Egypt he told my daughter the finished picture was so bad it couldn't be released, and asked her to beg me to make alterations and write new dialogue—which, in that era of "silent films," meant new titles. Sam said the work could be done in twenty-four hours, and knowing the circumstances, Helen insisted that I be paid \$1,500 for it. Sam appealed to me, but I agreed he should be penalized, and two days before my departure I undertook the intricate task of reconstructing a movie that had been made, the settings demolished and the players dismissed. The result was not good, of course, but at least it could be marketed. Since I had demanded the fee only to teach Sam a lesson, I gave two-thirds of it to charity, and the rest to Helen.

In that period before "the talkies," strange and wonderful things could be done with a completed movie, and doing them fascinated me. It was like playing with jigsaw puzzles. Under the quota system Famous Players had invested an enormous sum in a picture produced by the great German UFA, and then found that it simply didn't make sense. The story was of an inventor who, widowed and not liking it, built for himself a second wife constructed of steel. She must have been, I should think, an uncomfortable bed-fellow on winter nights. At any rate Famous Players was in despair, and contracted to pay me \$1,000 a day to salvage the picture.

This proved to be, by and large, the most interesting job I have ever done. There was an incredible footage of film; more than twice what could be shown in the ordinary space of time. I began by sitting in a projection room beside a push button and a stenographer, and viewing *all* the film half a dozen times. Touching the button halted the performance for thought. That night I wrote a quite different story that, I believed, could be told with the available "shots." It wasn't a very original story, being based on the theme of *Frankenstein*, but it had drama and an idea. A greedy employer hoped to grow rich by hiring the inventor to create hun-

dreds of steel workmen. These proved to be perfect, except that they could not be endowed with souls, and the result was catastrophe. As stated, this required putting together a jigsaw puzzle—taking from here a few feet of picture to be used there, and changing my story whenever some bit of it failed to lend itself to this surgery. One scene between a father and son was pieced together from five different scenes in the original, and then we discovered that papa began the short talk in a dinner jacket and ended it in business clothes. Sometimes a jointure of two scenes would result in a table or chair leaping across a room, and such miracles required omitting the offending “shots,” and substituting titles. Altogether—if I do say it—this was a remarkable piece of work, and one of which I shall always be proud. The original photography, showing a city of the mechanistic future, was amazingly ingenious and artistic, which, of course, was the only real hope of success.

When my job was done, none of my employers felt sanguine. Walter Wanger said, “You did your best, but the damned picture is nothing but machinery.” Vainly, I argued that it was an interesting idea to make the machine the villain of a play, but Walter was unconvinced. The film was released under the title of *Metropolis*, and afforded one of the thrilling moments of my life when, accidentally, Walter and I found ourselves landing together at Southampton, and decided to spend the evening at a theater in London. At a ticket office in the lobby of the Savoy Hotel we learned that our movie was on view at one of the principal cinema palaces. Walter asked for two seats, and the agent answered that *Metropolis* was the biggest hit in town and sold out for weeks in advance. Within a fortnight of its success Famous Players issued a press statement that the adaptation represented “a new high in ingenuity on the part of the editorial staff of this company.” I protested that the editorial staff hadn’t even seen the picture until it was finished, and an executive wrote me, “You can hardly expect us to give credit for this work to a man who may never do anything else for us, rather than to a staff identified with our organization!”

Time, they tell me, has wrought vast improvements in the art and ethics of filmdom. Pictures certainly are improved, though their cost, and the consequent necessity for grinding them out by

the hundred to appeal to millions, is a terrific handicap. No group can create hundreds of good plays or movies every year or for the lowest common mental denominator. Every art, I suspect, prospers in inverse proportion to the number of people required to support it. Moreover, as I have said before, a work of art is a work of individuality, and is not produced in conference or by relays of workmen. Just after *Metropolis*, Jesse Lasky, with whom I was associated in "Hell," asked me, "Have you ever thought of going to Hollywood?"

"Yes," I said.

"Why don't you go?"

"Because I've thought of it. The trouble with me is that I'm an incurable egotist. I *love* making sausages, but I don't care about having someone give me a skin to fill with sausage meat and pass on to another man who will tie the string around it."

"You're right," Lasky said, "and that's what's wrong with pictures. If we agreed that, after an apprenticeship, you were to write, cast, direct and produce your own material, without interference from anybody, would you go to Hollywood?"

"I should be strongly tempted."

"Good!" Jesse exclaimed. "Can you start Thursday?"

We compromised on my promise to consider the matter carefully, and to join Lasky and Adolph Zukor at dinner on Sunday prepared to say a definite "yes" or "no." By then, the answer was "no," but I needn't have troubled. Jesse provided an excellent dinner, which Zukor didn't attend, and a delightful evening during which Jesse's young son, who wanted to be a naturalist, startled me by dumping a seven-foot bull snake into my lap—but my going to Hollywood was never mentioned again.

The fact that the two of my plays best adapted to the screen, *Mr. Moneybags* and *The House Beautiful*, are the only two never filmed may be due to lack of imagination in the studios or to more practical considerations. In writing and lecturing I have been rather frank as to my view of the movies. Some years ago during a radio broadcast in Detroit, an interviewer nettled me by continually insisting that the pictures were superior to "spoken drama." "You'll admit," he urged, "that they have completely killed the legitimate theater."

I said, "On the contrary, they have helped the legitimate theater by taking the morons out of our audiences."

There was a great to-do about that statement, and Will Hays, the "motion picture czar," wrote me, "Of course, you will want to say you were misquoted in the *Detroit News*." To which I replied: "I have never been misquoted in my life. When I hold a view, right or wrong, I hold it with such conviction and vehemence that there isn't the slightest chance of my being misunderstood." From that day to this, I have not had a penny from Hollywood. Recently one of the companies wired Larry Giffen an offer for "a short story, called 'Perkins,' by Rupert Hughes," but when, accepting the offer, Larry mentioned the fact that the story was mine, we heard no more of the matter. Hollywood has always denied that it used a blacklist, and perhaps the truth is merely that none of my recent efforts appeals to the movie makers. I hope so.

In passing, however, I may say that "free speech" is increasingly an empty boast in America. We fight for it abroad while we are oblivious to its jeopardy at home. The writer or speaker who states his convictions honestly finds himself faced by blacklists, boycotts, and, inevitably now, by the possibility of government action. I am not referring to my early dismissal from the *Washington Times* because my criticisms were expensive to the theaters. I see, and saw then, no reason why managers should spend their money to attract business through one column while readers are being told in the next that the goods advertised are worthless. I have never complained that, when I wrote reviews for magazines, my erstwhile employers the Shuberts barred me from their theaters, banging a door painfully on the hand of a guest of mine, Gilbert Miller, who later was to become a brother manager. What I "view with alarm" is a growing unwillingness to hear any opinion not our own, and the newly created machinery for silencing every man whose statements displease any organized group. This is a subject discussion of which really belongs with my adventures as a lecturer, and I must beg you to restrain your impatience until we get to that.

In 1917 I found myself definitely at the end of what I may call the third phase of my career. During almost a decade I had been selling my birthright for a mess of pottage—with considerably

more mess than pottage. I had marked time with movies and musical comedies while I should have been advancing from the ground gained with *The Little Gray Lady* and *Such a Little Queen*. Looking backward, it is easy to see that this was a serious, if not a fatal blunder, and less easy to describe all my motives, estimate the profit or loss, or determine what else I could have done. These motives were not wholly mercenary. One of my weaknesses always has been an immense curiosity as to new fields, an immense interest in work I hadn't attempted before, and a certain amount of success in widely diversified occupations. From each of these I have learned something, though perhaps not enough to compensate for the time and effort involved. In my present maturity I am convinced that the best advice ever given anyone, in any connection, is Josh Billings' "Consider the postage stamp, my son; its usefulness consists in the fact that it sticks to one thing until it gets there."

For me, as for everyone else in my situation—and their name is legion—the financial consideration is more complicated. Are wife and family to be forbidden a man who wants to follow his star wherever it may lead, or, having acquired both, is he to disregard their comfort and security? Is he to disregard his own? I might have denied myself the cottage at Shoreham, and lived on bread and cheese in an attic, until I had done fine work and been assured of ample reward. My wife would have been first to urge this course. But can a man keep his self-respect while his family lives on bread and cheese, however willing they are to do so, and is there much sense in doing without while one is young enough to enjoy and in order that one may possibly have fame and fortune when one no longer cares for either? If nothing else, great achievement would seem to call for a oneness of purpose, an indifference to comfort and consequence, a ruthlessness, recklessness, and entirely rudimentary sense of responsibility that are lacking in me.

Perhaps all this is merely making excuses for myself; finding one of those "ready alibis." There is something more than a possibility that, whatever my path, I should have gone no farther than I have done, which may represent the limit of my capacities. It is hard to say how large a part one's mistakes and failures may play in one's progress. What one admires most in another man might prove the greatest detriment in one's self. A very hard and sophisti-

cated essayist scolded me recently for "wasting time" in acknowledging every communication that comes to my desk. "I never answer a letter," he said, "unless it is about something important to me, while you spend hours comforting strangers worried about their children or their careers." When I mentioned this to Mrs. William Brown Meloney, editor of *This Week*, to which I contribute short articles on what I believe to be sane living, she argued, "But don't you see, Channing, that if you were the kind of person who never answered a letter, you wouldn't be you, and whatever time you gained, you would have lost the quality many of us like best in your work?"

Nothing is more profitless than speculating on what might have been, except as a guide to what may be, and at my age what may be is fairly certain to bear a strong resemblance to what has been. If I were beginning again, I think, I should never write a movie, or a musical comedy, or a magazine article, or even a book or a lecture. I should put aside collaborations, and dramatizations, and "pot-boilers" of every sort. I have always done my best with whatever I attempted, but beginning again, I should attempt nothing merely because it offered itself. I should devote myself wholly to writing the sort of plays I always wanted to write, and hang the consequences. Beginning again, I might follow this course, and I might not. Following it, I might do better work than I have done, and I might not. Who knows? What I do know is that, with whatever mistakes and failures, I have had a full and happy life, and that now, in its last quarter, I can think of nothing I should like better than an encore.

## SEVERAL STORIES AND TWO PLAYS

IN HIS middle age Charles Klein quarreled with his wife, who left him to live in England. They had been a devoted couple through hard times before Klein wrote *The Lion and the Mouse*, and Charlie's friends did their utmost to bring them together again. This was arranged, and Charlie agreed to join Mrs. Klein in London. He was to have sailed late in April 1915, and a few days afterward I was disturbed at meeting him at the Society of American Dramatists. "I thought you were on your way to England," I said, with rebuke in my tone.

Charlie looked guilty. "I'm going all right," he answered. And then, after a moment's silence, "The truth is I'm afraid of the submarines. A slow ship like the one I'd chosen would be apple pie for those assassins, so I've canceled my passage and I'm sailing on the *Lusitania*." Charlie went down with that vessel when she was torpedoed May 7, 1915, while the one he had abandoned docked safely at Southampton.

At one time or another most of us speculate on Fate, and after this, of course, the subject was much in my mind. My friend, Robert Gilbert Welsh, himself drowned later while attempting to rescue a woman, had founded a fine poem on the oriental legend of Azrael, Angel of Death. The legend tells how a slave begs his master for leave to go to Bagdad, because "I see Azrael hovering near and I must escape him." When the slave has departed, his master asks Azrael, "Why did you approach my slave?" and Azrael replies, "Because in him I thought I recognized one I was bidden to seek in Bagdad." Again and again I wondered whether Azrael would have found Charlie on the slower ship, or whether, from the beginning, it had been ordained that they were to meet "in Bagdad."

Slowly, all this took shape as a play. Fate, I decided, was only Character, the consequences of which no one can escape. After the failure of *The Grass Widow* and my retirement as a librettist, throughout the summer of 1917 I groped for a way of exemplifying this theory. Just over half a mile from my beach at Shoreham is a charted rock called Sill's, to which in those days I swam every morning. Perched there in almost inviolable solitude, I could ponder my theme for hours. At last I hit upon the method of telling the same story four times. "Go east, or west, or north, or south," Fate said to my hero, "and meet the thing from which you run away."

The piece was written that winter, and titled *The Moving Finger*—from the lines by Omar. As it was being completed, I encountered Ren Wolf at the Friars' Club, and for the first time told him my story. He asked, "Isn't it a good deal like O. Henry's 'Roads of Destiny'?"

I hadn't thought of that, but I did now, and concluded that Ren was right. We had had too many experiences with "plagiarism" to take chances, so I contracted with Doubleday Page for the dramatic rights in the novelette by O. Henry, whose estate received a third of my royalties. Many years afterward at a meeting of the Authors' League a charming old lady introduced herself to me as "Mrs. Porter—Mrs. O. Henry." I asked her to lunch with me on Saturday, and she replied, "I shan't be in New York. That's what I came over to tell you. All his life my husband and I wanted to travel abroad, but we never could afford it. Now, my daughter and I are going tomorrow—and you sent us." Though by then I had learned that the O. Henry story was common in oriental literature, and might be used freely by anyone, I have never ceased being glad of that contract with Doubleday Page.

The problems involved in writing this particular play could be solved only with the greatest ingenuity. It was easy to show that the same experiences awaited my hero at the four ends of the earth, but they had to be different, too, or an audience would have dozed at the first repetition. When I had made the four stories sufficiently, if superficially, dissimilar, the question was how to remind a witness that they were basically the same. This I contrived to do by three devices: First, finding a concrete thing, an object read-



ily identified—in this case, a small pearl-handled pistol—that appeared at the crucial instant to deal the blow of Fate. Second, after many experiments, suspending at considerable height a thin glass bell that, struck lightly by pressing an electric button, produced an eerie note at this instant. The third and most ingenious device was an adaptation of Wagner's *Leitmotifs*. You will remember that when Siegfried's sword is laid by his dead body in *Götterdämmerung*, for a few bars the music is identical with that accompanying his father's withdrawal of the sword from the tree in the first act of *Die Walküre*. Thus we are reminded that this is the same sword, and of its history. In my play I did my reminding with dialogue, using, for the same purpose, a few identical phrases in each repetition of what was fundamentally the equivalent outcome. Finally, I had to solve the problem of *dramatis personae*. Obviously, my hero would not encounter in Alaska the associates he found on Long Island, and I had to make clear that so far as they played the same part in his fate, the gambler in Alaska was also the decadent millionaire on Long Island. All this was as difficult as it was novel, and my final manuscript was not ready until the spring of 1918.

Since I had acquired O. Henry's story, it was as well to have the advantage of a well-known title, so I called the completed work *Roads of Destiny*. It had been sold to Cohan and Harris, but before they could present it Al Woods produced a play so like mine in theme that we were much disturbed. This was Max Marcin's *Eyes of Youth*, which he had written in my own obliviousness to O. Henry—and *The Arabian Nights*. Two or three very similar incidents in both plays were original with their authors, and the likeness was pure coincidence. After all, there are only so many ideas, as there are only so many notes in music, and it is inevitable that they occur in more than one composition. Wider understanding of this fact might lessen the number of legal actions alleging plagiarism. Wolf and I combed an atlas for hours to find a town that would fit our purpose as the *locale* of *A Perfect Lady*. As we were completing that comedy, what was almost exactly its story appeared under the name of Rupert Hughes in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Ren was for scrapping our manuscript; where tyros rush to court, experienced authors rush to the nearest wastebasket. Instead, I suggested that we have a chat with Hughes.

Rupert met us for luncheon at the Knickerbocker Hotel, and behaved like the intelligent man and gracious gentleman that he is. When we proposed giving him documentary evidence, he said, "Nonsense! You don't suppose you have to *prove* to me that you are not thieves! I'll write you a letter expressing my assurance that, quite independently, you and I arrived at the same idea." As he was leaving us, I remarked, "Of course there's nothing unusual in the fact that both of us hit upon this particular plot, but how on earth did you hit upon the same town that we used?"

Rupert answered, "My mother was born there."

Whatever the accidents of birth, or anything else, Cohan and Harris were unwilling to risk *Roads of Destiny* if it resembled *Eyes of Youth*. Sam Harris and I attended the Al Woods opening, with Marjorie Rambeau as star, in Atlantic City, and Sam gave up his contract for *Roads*. Al listened to our discussion of the subject, and when Sam had gone, said, "I don't see the resemblance, and if your story is as good as it sounds, I'll bring *both* plays to New York!" He did, too, and was largely responsible for their success. Florence Reed starred in *Roads of Destiny*, which ran most of the season of 1918-1919 at the Republic. Her leading man was Edmund Lowe.

This was my first business association with Al Woods, and I still regard him as one of the most remarkable geniuses our theater ever produced. Also, as I describe our subsequent years of work together, you will understand better what I have written as to the impossibility of deciding that men of this sort were all wrong because they weren't all right, or of judging them by accepted standards. Wholly uneducated, reared in the slums, and reaching the stage through various menial employments, Al had no way of acquiring the code of more favored citizens. He did acquire, or was born with a generosity as openhanded as some of his business practices were the reverse, and a flair for the theater that often was breath-taking.

Again and again I have seen Al give a five-dollar tip to a waitress in a quick-lunch room, merely because "she needs it more than I do." If *you* didn't need it, or under different circumstances, Al might have taken the five dollars from you—or many times five

dollars. Returning from Europe during the run of *Roads*, I found at the dock a summons to see Woods before I went to my apartment. We had been offered \$20,000 for movie rights, he said; did I want to accept it? The price was very low for a successful play, but Al urged unusual conditions and advised making the sale immediately. Tired and anxious to get home, I agreed, until I found myself confronting a document transferring my half-interest in these rights, not to a movie producer, but to Woods. Of course, I refused to sign. "I was willing to take your advice," I explained, "while I thought we lost equally if it proved wrong. I certainly won't do so if *you* are to *profit* by its proving wrong." Woods was outraged at my suspicious nature, but my signature did not appear on the dotted line.

Weeks afterward Sam Goldwyn came to my luncheon table in the Astor Hotel. "When did you get back?" he inquired. "I bought the picture rights in *Roads* while you were away, and I've been waiting for your signature to complete the transaction."

"What did you pay for the rights?" I asked.

Sam answered, "Fifty thousand dollars."

Of course I repeated this conversation to Woods. As I entered the office, he had taken a cigar from my breastpocket, and smoked it while I told my story. It wasn't a very good cigar, and Al's face clouded with the clouds he blew from it. At the end of my recital, he asked, "Did you give me this cigar?"

I nodded.

"Then," Al said, "whatever I done to you, kid, we're even."

Of course I laughed. How could anyone be angry with a man like that? Equally of course, I received my full share of the \$50,000. The following December, as usual, Al set before me a good-sized basket heaped with expensive jewelry. "Take what you want for Christmas," he said. The basket was presented to all Al's friends, and to a number of his office boys and other small wage earners.

Woods' prodigality in producing a play was as unfailing as his instinct for appraising and casting it. If he was willing to take a few dollars from authors in a manner not strictly according to Hoyle, he was equally willing to give them, and actors, thousands. When Famous Players considered venturing into the legitimate

theater, and made overtures to dramatists, Al sent for his three favorites of the moment—Max Marcin, Bayard Veiller and myself—and proposed a \$10,000 bonus to each of us, in addition to royalties, in return for an option on our next three plays. Max and Bayard accepted, I believe; I declined the bonus and, instead, made an agreement that Al would *produce* the plays whether he liked them or not. For his \$20,000 gamble—if he actually risked it—Woods got *Cheating Cheaters* and *Eyes of Youth* from Max, and a part of *Within the Law* and all of *The Trial of Mary Dugan* from Bayard. From me, without any considerable investment except faith, he had *Roads of Destiny* and *The Sign on the Door*, and would have had *The Fool*, which earned a profit close to a million dollars, but that he weakened at the last moment. In other words, Al's return for a little daring was not less than one million dollars, and might have been two million. I thought of that often during my later days in the theater, when few managers would risk a \$500 advance until the last comma appeared in the manuscript and the last possible revision had been made.

Al never saw or heard *The Sign on the Door* until after its opening in New York. I tried to read him the play, but he had been out late and dozed through the first act. Far from agreeing with David Garrick, who under similar circumstances, said, "Sleep is an opinion," Woods merely remarked, "Why do I have to listen? I got to produce the damn thing anyway." When I suggested Lowell Sherman, then a not very distinguished actor who had been in Woods' *The Woman in Room 13*, for the role of Devereaux, and Lowell declined it, Al said, "Look, Lowell; here's your note for \$2,000 you owe me, and I'll tear it up if you say you'll play that part."

"O. K.," Lowell answered, and Al destroyed the note. When, after Lowell's departure, I commented on Al's tossing away \$2,000, he answered, "Hell, Lowell would never have paid it, anyway!"

Woods' quick instinct for what would be profitable in the theater was almost infallible. He had no understanding of the better kind of literature or drama—a disability shared by most managers of this time. One of the most prosperous of these boasted to me that he had never read a book in his life, and, quite seriously, this may explain much affluence in motion pictures, the theater, and

even in some kinds of authorship and publishing. Few men "write down" to their readers with any degree of success, and this is equally true of dealers in their work. Financially, the fortunate are those whose own tastes are near the level of the multitude. Woods' limitation was that he could not believe the public to be interested in anyone but criminals and prostitutes. For many years this view was justified at the box office, but when we were surfeited with criminals and prostitutes Woods could not turn with the tide. Early in our association, Al wanted me to dramatize W. L. George's novel, *A Bed of Roses*. I could see nothing to dramatize, and asked Al whether he had read the book. "No," he replied, "but it's about a streetwalker, isn't it?"

About this time Woods engaged a favorite in films, Theda Bara, to star in an utterly stupid melodrama called *The Blue Flame*. After the out-of-town opening Al telephoned begging me to join him in Boston for a diagnosis of the play's maladies. On the train I met Al's wife, Rose. A blizzard was raging, and reaching Boston too late for dinner, we went straight to the theater, and from there to Woods' rooms at the Copley-Plaza. When I told Al this was the worst play I had ever seen, he flew into a rage, which increased as Rose endorsed my opinion. "You're a pair of damned knockers," Al shouted, "and you'd better get the hell out of here!" Out we went, into the snow, like Anna Moore in *Way Down East*, and at two in the morning found lodgings at the Touraine. Next day we returned to New York, and it was weeks after the dismal failure of *The Blue Flame* before Al restored us to favor.

During this trip Mrs. Woods told me the story of her courtship and marriage, which may or may not have been an exaggeration. Rose was behind the counter of a pawnshop in a town where one of Al's first theatrical enterprises was threatened with disaster, she said. Lacking money for railway tickets, Woods went to the shop to pawn a diamond ring. Rose mentioned the facts that she had \$500 and wanted to go on the stage. Rightly regarding these as a providential coincidence, Al offered her a part in the play, but Rose had been a patron of melodrama and wasn't too sure that heaven would protect the working girl. Marriage seemed the only way out for everybody, and, legally united, Al and Rose and the \$500 left town that afternoon.

The marriage lasted, and happily, almost a lifetime. Al took his flair for melodrama into the firm of Sullivan, Harris and Woods, which produced hundreds of masterpieces of the type of *Why Girls Go Wrong* and *Queen of the White Slaves*. Most of these were written by Owen Davis, who afterward became one of our leading dramatists and the winner of a Pulitzer Prize. The Harris of the partnership was Sam Harris, later of Cohan and Harris, and still later a prosperous producer on his own account. Each of the plays was written in a few hours, and often to fit scenes of violence depicted on lithographs purchased long in advance. Woods climbed on these steppingstones to better things, produced a score or more resounding successes, and, as real property, acquired the Woods Theater in Chicago, and the Eltinge Theater in New York. He was rated a millionaire when the crash came in 1929. Within a few months he was bankrupt.

None of Al's intimates could ever explain the suddenness and completeness of this debacle. The commonly accepted version of the story is that Rose shared control of their assets, and having a passion for gambling, "went over her head" while her husband was in Europe. Woods returned to find himself ruined. I never saw them together afterward, but no confirmation of the story ever came from Al, and no one, I think, has ever heard him speak a word of blame for Rose. Recently when I lectured in Hollywood I saw Al sitting alone and shabbily dressed in the lobby of a hotel, and invited him to join a party that included half a dozen noted actors and authors. When the party broke up, all of us agreed that ruined and elderly, Al Woods still seemed a giant amid the new race of pygmies that has come into our theater.

It was at the Woods Theater in Chicago, almost simultaneously with Al's production of *Roads of Destiny*, that Edgar Selwyn and I shared one of the quickest and easiest successes of my career. This was our joint work, *The Crowded Hour*, which owed its existence to an experience of mine that began in Washington, and to a chance remark I made to Edgar in New York. The experience in question I have already mentioned as one of two stories of friendships with lost ladies. This not too particular lady resided in the segregated district south of Pennsylvania Avenue, and was,

perhaps, the most notorious of its denizens. One of the boys on the *Times* fell in love with her, and invited me to be the best man at their wedding. As my protests were of no avail, I consented to see the thing through, and next morning in broad daylight and two hacks we drove into Hooker's Division. There I sat on a trunk in the chamber of the bride-to-be, and told her she was destroying a promising young man. He returned at that moment, and tearing off her finery, the girl cried to him, "Your friend says just what I've been saying, and he's right, and I'm damned if I'll marry you!"

She did, nevertheless, and the resultant hullabaloo was terrific. My colleague was fired at once, and I should have been except that I was doing two men's work for one man's pay, and morality couldn't be expected to go that far. My erring associate got a job in Philadelphia, where his wife joined him. Long afterward, while I was employed by William A. Brady, I dined with them in New York. The lost lady was keeping house, cooking and sewing; expecting a baby, too, and, though I have been profane in conversation with bishops, I wouldn't have said "hell" before my hostess for worlds.

We drifted apart, but a year later the girl came to my office, weeping, to say the child had been born dead, and that her husband was going to divorce her. He didn't even accuse her of wrongdoing since their marriage, and would I appeal to him? I quoted Haddon Chambers' witticism about "a man who interfered between husband and wife. The husband and wife each got a black eye; the man got two." My caller, who was destitute, borrowed thirty dollars and disappeared.

One by one, those dollars came back—grimy bills in stamped envelopes bearing no address but my own. Then I ran into the girl in a cheap restaurant in Jersey City, where she was a waitress. As she refused to accept the money she had repaid, my mother bought things the girl needed and sent them to her. When we met next, she had become a telephone operator at a hotel in uptown New York. The weather was hot, and I invited her to drive with me in the park, but she said I couldn't afford to be seen with her. She was still in love with her husband, and lived in a boarding-house she didn't like because his name, as author of a popular book, appeared on a billboard opposite her window.

Toward the end of the First World War my wife and I encountered this lost lady at a performance in the old Majestic Theater, in Columbus Circle. She told my wife an astonishing tale of having met me originally at home on the Virginia plantation owned by her parents. Whether or not this yarn was invented for my protection, I'm not sure, but my better four-fifths, who had known the true story from the beginning, was less amused than pitiful. As we were leaving the theater, our companion remarked that on Saturday she was going to France with a telephone unit. Six months later I read that she had been cited for gallantry under fire, but I never saw her again.

Early in 1918 Daniel Frohman begged me to be his guest at one of the dances of the Sixty Club. There I met Selwyn, and both of us were a bit shocked at the gaiety in a period of world crisis. The orchestra swung into George Cohan's new song, and Edgar remarked, "They're playing 'Over There.'"

"Yes," I said, "and dancing over here."

Next morning Selwyn phoned to ask me to lunch with him at the Knickerbocker. "That comment of yours has haunted me all night," he explained, "and I think there's a play in it."

I answered, "So do I, and I've got the story."

This tale of the lost lady provided a *theme* rather than a plot. If stories from everyday life could be pitched unadapted into plays and books, as Rennold Wolf observed, "Everybody'd do it." Selwyn and I decided, however, to deal with a group who were wasters "over here," and ennobled by becoming part of the strife and selflessness "over there." What we imagined might have won her citation for my regenerate friend became the stirring climax of our third act. The play was written under forced draft in the Selwyns' home at Croton-on-Hudson. Edgar was harvesting an acre of spring onions, and as, to paraphrase Gilbert, onions and my mother were the only things I loved, I ate most of them. Our favorite joke was that on this account, "it ought to be a strong play."

Though most of the job was done in less than a month, I recall one evidence that success, if not genius, may be "an infinite capacity for taking pains." There is a dialogue in the last act of *The Crowded Hour* that I rewrote eleven times. Edgar insisted it was my kind of a scene, not his, but after hearing every version, his



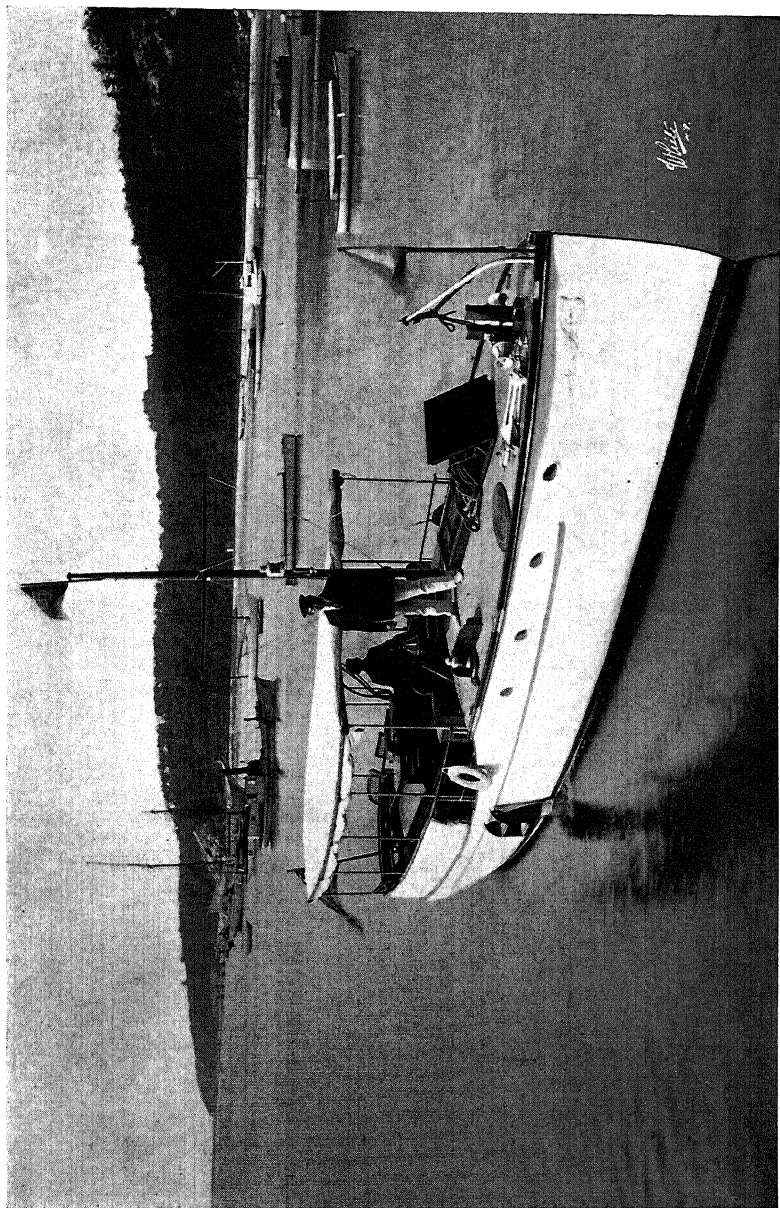
comment was, "You can do better." Finally, deeply depressed, I returned to my flat in New York. There I made my eleventh try, suddenly certain that I'd "got it" at last. I read the scene to Edgar and Margaret Mayo next day, and when I asked, "Is that right?" Edgar replied, "You know damned well it is!" I did. A man may be mistaken as to shots fired into the outer circles of a target, but when he hits the gong in the center there can be no mistake.

Our hardest work, I think, was finding a title. After we had rejected fifty, Edgar suggested *The Clarion*. When I sneered that this sounded like the name of a country newspaper, Selwyn insisted I didn't know the meaning of the word, so we looked it up in the *Century Dictionary*. There, with the definition, we found a quotation attributed to Sir Walter Scott—

"Sound, sound the *clarion*, fill the fife!  
To all the sensual world proclaim,  
One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name!"

"That's it!" we exclaimed in chorus, and our play became *The Crowded Hour*.

Of course it was produced by the Selwyns, Archie and Edgar, who were then among our most successful managers. Willette Kershaw, an excellent actress, was chosen for the principal role, and there were fine performances also by Christine Norman, Alan Dinehart, and a stirring Frenchman named Georges Flateau, who recited "The Star-Spangled Banner" as I have never heard it, before or since. Edgar directed rehearsals, of which I saw little, as I was busy a few doors away with *Roads of Destiny*. I was to go to Chicago, and Edgar had tickets for both of us, but Al Woods thought I shouldn't leave *Roads*. I broke this news to Selwyn at the Grand Central, and he offered my ticket to a young newspaper critic who had been disconsolate because his best girl was making the trip without him. As she was in tears at the separation I promised to review that evening's play for his newspaper so that the course of true love might not be interrupted. The critic said this was impossible, and as we walked away, told me why. Later I told Edgar. "The real reason Louis couldn't go with his girl was that he had a date for that night with another one." Edgar laughed.



"THE PERFECT LADY"  
in harbor at Port Jefferson, L. I. "I fell in love with her like a college boy with his first chorus girl."



THE FIRST TIME I EVER HAD TWO PLAYS IN THE SAME STREET


Al Woods spent two hours getting this photograph of the electric signs, and it was a bit of a thrill.

"Honors even!" he exclaimed. "She had another fellow waiting for her on the train!"

To our surprise *The Crowded Hour* was an instant and riotous hit in Chicago. It became advisable to organize another company immediately for the Selwyn Theater, New York, and for star of this cast we selected Jane Cowl. As had happened with Julia Dean in *The Bishop's Carriage*, Miss Kershaw was in despair. She had regarded this role as her great opportunity on Broadway, and the rumpus that followed the engagement of Miss Cowl finally required my abandoning *Roads* temporarily to pour oil on troubled waters in the West. Both ladies were capital in the part, though Miss Kershaw's thin wistfulness and her passion in emotional scenes gave her a slight "edge." She had every reason to be angry at being compelled to remain in Chicago, but in the circumstances it couldn't be helped.

*Roads of Destiny* and *The Crowded Hour* opened within a few days of each other, and not more than fifty yards apart in Forty-second Street. Turning the corner from Broadway with Al Woods late the preceding Sunday, I suddenly saw the two electric signs. "This is the first time," I told Woods, "that I ever had two plays running together in the same street, and it's a bit of a thrill." When we had parted, Al spent two hours getting a photograph of the electric signs for me. It is still attached to my screen—souvenir of a stirring experience and of a man who, with all his faults, still could provide moments worth remembering.

## WARS OF ALL SIZES

NE morning in early November 1918, I was presiding over a rehearsal of *Roads of Destiny* on the stage of the Republic Theater when I became conscious of increasing inattention. This is rare among actors, and I asked for an explanation. Edmund Lowe said, "We've just heard that the Armistice has been signed."

For a few minutes I tried to go on with our work, and then gave it up. The air was charged with hysteria. "We'll take a recess until two o'clock," I announced. I had business at my bank in Thirty-fourth Street, but when I reached it the clerks had gone mad. My sedate and scholarly friend, the vice president, was tearing up telephone books and throwing the pieces out of the window. At the Hotel McAlpin, where I tried to lunch, an emotional French waiter kissed me on both cheeks, and after waiting vainly half an hour for a sandwich, I gave that up, too. Returning to the theater proved as impossible as it would have been useless. The streets were packed with milling, shouting people, throwing confetti and twirling rattlers that had appeared miraculously. As no one else came back for rehearsal, my absence didn't matter.

By night pandemonium reigned. There was surprisingly little drinking, but universal drunkenness of a kind I have seen induced by such nonalcoholic intoxicants as unexpected success, or a small boat headed into the wind and a choppy sea. My wife and daughter joined me for dinner in a small Italian restaurant in Fifty-second Street, where *we* were joined by utter strangers of both sexes who, for the moment, became our bosom friends. Within a few hours word got about that all this was premature, and the Armistice *hadn't* been signed, but the celebration continued of its own mo-

mentum. Next morning, when we resumed rehearsals, the streets were a mess, and everyone seemed a bit bleary and ashamed, but we had "shot the works," and the real Armistice a few days later was a distinct fizzle.

As I had been too young for active service in the Spanish-American War, I was too old in the First World War, though in common with other men approaching forty I was registered just before it ended. Washington moved in a mysterious way its blunders to perform; two million of our population went overseas, or were ready to go, with almost no equipment, and a few million more stayed home and worried. For several million others, as now, the war was a parlor game and their first chance for limelight. Lovely and futile ladies of all ages blossomed in uniforms, stood on street corners giving cigarettes to all and sundry, and reserved their knitting of socks and sweaters for evenings at the theater. Those of us who didn't reach the front lines were far more ferocious than those who did. Father Francis Patrick Duffy, returning from France where he had earned the title of "The Fighting Chaplain," ruined a dinner party in our home by remarking that the Germans were the best soldiers in Europe. That evening, also, he told us of a midwestern farmer who had been in the Union Army throughout the Civil War, and who, failing to buy Liberty Bonds, woke one morning to find his house and barn painted yellow. After the old fellow had hanged himself, someone discovered that he hadn't money enough to buy postage stamps. By the time this party broke up I think many of my guests suspected Pat of treason.

My own knitting took the form of selling bonds, making speeches, and writing propaganda for George Creel. With Bruce Bairnsfather, cartoonist of *The Better 'Ole*, I motored about supposedly disaffected sections of the country, making addresses in bad German while Bruce held the audiences by drawing pictures of Old Bill. Creel, husband of Blanche Bates, the actress, had served with me on the Executive Committee of the Authors' League, and for his bureau I wrote pamphlets to be translated and dropped behind the lines in Russia and elsewhere. Edgar Selwyn and I regarded *The Crowded Hour* as a major contribution to the war spirit, and—luckily for me—it wasn't until later that a calm

survey of the whole business resulted in what is still called my "pacifist play," *The Enemy*.\*

There has been almost no time in my life when I haven't been engaged in some minor war of my own, and the longest and most successful was fought for men and women who earn their living by writing. It was of these that Shylock might have been speaking when he said, "sufferance is the badge of all our tribe." In America especially, and in the theater more particularly, the national pastime was skinning an author. Copyright legislation, or lack of it, prevented Charles Dickens, Gilbert and Sullivan, and hundreds of others being paid for the use of their work in the United States, and even now a writer's literary property ceases being his property after a certain number of years. If you make a pair of boots or own a watch, they belong to you, or to your heirs or assigns, so long as they last, but the product of your brain and pen becomes common property after a limited term. The theory is that a book or play good enough to survive twenty-eight years, or as many more if copyright is renewed, should be available to everybody. However, the benefits are almost never passed on to the ultimate consumer; Gilbert and Sullivan were presented at regular box-office rates, and no one but the impresario profited by the fact that Gilbert and Sullivan did not. In any event, a government that wanted to give away your boots and your watch would begin by buying them. I have already spoken of the hardship to authors in our income tax, and these are only two of the discriminations against a profession that provides the greatest glory of its nation.

If you have stuck to me so far, you are aware of some of the injustices inflicted upon dramatists by managers. I used to wonder why, when there wasn't money enough to go round, these latter always paid billposters, transfer men, stagehands, and—somewhat more reluctantly—actors, before they could find a penny for the author. I concluded it was because managers *saw* the billposters

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\*Lest you suspect me, as my guests suspected Father Duffy, of being out of sympathy with our war efforts, I hasten to ask that you defer judgment until the end of this book. Meanwhile, I rely upon some knowledge of my other written and spoken words on the subject, and of my early membership in the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. If I lack sympathy, it is only with those who merely play at contributing to our efforts—luckily, a small minority.

and stagehands at work. Few outsiders have ever believed that a writer works. A writer is a lucky fellow who, after a day of dalliance, wakes in the night with an inspiration, dashes it off on the bed sheet, and rises next morning to find himself rich and famous. To most of our citizens, there is no real labor but manual labor. That's why a bricklayer is a "worker," while a teacher, or a doctor, or lawyer, or author is not. William A. Brady, finding me dictating to a stenographer while I was in his employ, exclaimed, "You just talk your stuff! God, *that's* easy!" On another occasion my friend Richard, the carpenter, seeing me packing some books, jibed, "So you work, too!"

"Since you built this study," I answered, "I've written two million words in it, and, if you don't believe *that's* work, never mind thinking them out; just try copying 'em."

I have spent days trucking on docks, and days at composition that made trucking seem child's play.

Failure to realize that an author, or an executive, or a professional man *can* work, or ever does, explains envy, class hatred, and our trend to collectivism. The quickest and surest way, I should think, to turn a labor agitator into a friend of the white-collar man, and even of the capitalist, would be to give him the five days of unbroken effort I experienced with *Such a Little Queen*, or a week of the grinding toil I have seen done by general managers or owners of businesses. By which easy stages we return to the fact that the author used to be the universal "goat" in the theater, and elsewhere, and, I think chiefly because while the manager saw a carpenter use his hammer, he never saw an author use his brains, or had the faintest idea how it was done.

Almost immediately after the production of my first play, I joined the Society of American Dramatists, which was founded by Bronson Howard and had rooms in West Forty-second Street. The society was good, but otherwise ineffective. We held monthly meetings, gave an annual dinner and provided beginners with the pleasure of knowing Augustus Thomas and Charlie Klein and William Gillette. As to this pleasure, I am not being satirical; it was well worth the money most of us didn't pay in dues. Gillette, who not only wrote plays, but became famous by acting in *Held by the Enemy*, *Secret Service* and *Sherlock Holmes*, was a stimulating



companion, and the wielder of a scarifying wit that made our current Dorothy Parker dull and harmless in comparison. George Broadhurst, the playwright, told me the story of a visit to Gillette's place in Connecticut. Two or three goats stuck their heads between palings to lick Gillette's hand. Delighted, the actor said, "Down here, even the goats love me."

Broadhurst jeered, "Love you! They only want to be fed!"

"George," Gillette replied solemnly, "there comes a time in a man's life when he calls that love."

With all his charm and good fortune Gillette had a bitter and mordant streak. When Klein remarked of two of our members that "they have been married thirty years, but she still loves him passionately," Will added, "Yes, and annoys him in other ways." Once Gillette showed me a sheaf of typewritten pages. "When I first came to New York," he explained, "I lived in a boardinghouse, and spent my evenings sitting in the parlor with the other paying guests. For practice in shorthand, which I was studying, I took down everything that was said during a period of several months. Afterward I transcribed the result, and if you'd like to get an idea of the vacuity of human conversation, I'll lend you this manuscript." My last word from Gillette was a card, dated December 15, 1925, when he was sixty-six years old and wrote, "Your encouragement more than balances those confounded fellows who entertain the revolting sentiment that I ought to get off the stage *quick*."

Charlie Klein and I both felt that the Society of American Dramatists should do more than give dinners, and with that in view I formed and headed a committee to increase our membership. We listed the authors of all the first plays produced in five years, and made the astonishing discovery that only about 8 per cent of them ever produced second plays. More than 70 per cent of the theater's successes were written by the same score of trained and established dramatists. Charlie and I discussed this situation at some length, and Charlie said, "Anybody can have an idea. Almost anybody can find a manager, or stage director, or another author to help him whip that idea into acceptable shape. But, evidently, only 8 per cent of the lot take the trouble to learn their trade after that, and so they are never heard of again. A man puts into his first

play all he has lived in the years up to then, and often it suffices, in spite of inexpert treatment. He puts into his second play only what he has lived since the first, and that *doesn't* suffice. To extract a dozen plays from experience, and make them interesting, a man *must* know his trade."

There is truth in this, and it explains much that is still happening in literature and drama. A gifted woman of my acquaintance continues to be known by a melodrama acted a quarter of a century ago—her only success in the theater. This piece had a capital plot, which owed its effect behind the footlights to the skill of the dramatist-director who reconstructed and produced it. As she never mastered the art herself, and never found another such director, she has never had another success in the theater, though her wealth of material and skill as a novelist have served her well in that field. This is the age of the amateur, and that explains the vast preponderance of impossible plays and dire failures that find their way to our stage. There are no longer great technicians like Henry Miller and David Belasco to shape crude clay, and as only a dozen of our present writers for the stage are really professional, the number who appear and disappear increases while the state of the theater grows progressively worse.

Charlie and I abandoned our drive for membership and militance, and in 1911 Arthur Train, famous for his stories of "Tutt and Mr. Tutt," goaded by an outrageous experience with a magazine, founded the Authors' League of America. It was first proposed to call this the League of Authors and Dramatists, but as the Authors' League it was incorporated in 1912, and the first annual meeting was held April 8, 1913. I joined immediately, and served on the Council continuously from 1915 until 1926. In the beginning Winston Churchill—not the British statesman but the American novelist—was president, and Theodore Roosevelt was vice president. Subsequently I was elected to the latter office, and to the Executive Committee. My associates were the most distinguished—and delightful—members of our craft; at one time or another they included almost every notable writer in our country: Booth Tarkington, George Ade, Hamlin Garland, James Lane Allen, John Burroughs, Ellen Glasgow, Rupert Hughes, Jack Lon-

don, Basil King, Will Irwin, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Ida Tarbell, Owen Wister, Upton Sinclair, Jesse Lynch Williams—the list is too long to be printed here.

For a considerable period we met weekly for luncheon and conference in Browne's Chop House, the famous old restaurant adjoining the Empire Theater that also cradled the Friars' Club. When Theodore Roosevelt died in 1919, I was one of a committee of writers chosen to draft resolutions. After nearly two hours together we hadn't produced one impressive sentence. Rupert Hughes said, "It takes me twenty minutes to write my own name," but even this didn't explain why in six times twenty minutes a collaboration of the most experienced authors in the country failed to produce anything. Subsequently each brought to a second meeting what he had done alone, and a combination of these contributions proved satisfactory.

Many of my most gratifying and enduring friendships began at these luncheons. Usually our business had been transacted by three o'clock, and reveling in newly acquired control of my own time, I would spend an additional hour chatting with Rex Beach and Samuel Hopkins Adams, or with the artists, Orson Lowell and Charles Dana Gibson. For its bearing on what I have written of manners and morals, I still remember an anecdote related by Lowell. He had a studio at Twenty-third Street and Broadway, opposite the Flatiron Building, where in days when women's skirts swept the sidewalks shameless males gathered to take advantage of what a rhymster called:

" . . . the breezes  
That lift the chemises  
To the girls' kneeses,  
And let the men seeses  
What they darn pleases."

One afternoon Orson was giving instruction in drawing from the nude when he looked up to find his class staring out of the window. "Young gentlemen," he said, "I've been talking, and this girl has been posing more than an hour, and if you're more interested in a street accident, I think we'll all go home."

One of the students apologized, "Sorry, sir, but it isn't a street accident. There's a high wind outside, and it's giving a fine exhibition of women's legs."

The nude model was all in the day's work; the silken calves seen through the window were a forbidden and extraordinary treat.

"Reaction," which has come to have a new meaning, is correctly defined as resistance to another action; Herbert Spencer says, "Every trespass produces a reaction which is extreme in proportion as the trespass is great." It was the liquor dealers and saloonkeepers who gave us Prohibition, and the greedy and tyrannical employers who gave us the not unmixed blessing of labor unions. The theatrical manager who behaved fairly with actors and authors had become a conspicuous exception. As must have become apparent to my readers, even established dramatists were rooked pretty regularly, while the tyro was lucky if a successful production paid living expenses during the time he spent writing it. For years I had urged the Society of American Dramatists to fight for a Standard Contract, assuring the same treatment, if not the same terms, to all writers, and now Standard Contract became almost the slogan of the Authors' League.

What managers dreaded most was that the League might join the American Federation of Labor, thus winning the support of billposters, transfer men and stagehands, who seemed to them far more nearly indispensable than mere dramatists. The proposal had been made often, and as often voted down. Now, however, a small committee of which I was chairman, and which had two other members—Owen Davis and James Forbes—privately decided upon a colossal bluff. We had conferred fruitlessly with the Shuberts, who told us—believe it or not—that if all the dramatists refused to deal with them, they would write their own plays! The next day we contrived to start a rumor that reaction to this defiance would take the form of a special meeting that night at which the League was almost certain to reverse itself on the question of applying for a charter from the Federation of Labor. That afternoon we three called on Sam Harris, who headed the managers' association—not as a committee, but as friends who wished to warn him. We were opposed to the charter, we said, but it was sure to be voted that night *unless* we conspired to halt it by appearing with a signed Standard

Contract. Owen, Jimmie and I had drawn such a contract; the managers executed it before dinner, and though there was no meeting of the League, we conveyed the glad tidings by telephone to its principal members.

Whether or not the truth of this story got about, the first Standard Contract between managers and writers did little good. The authors who needed it most could not be induced to join the League, and like the covenant of a subsequent and more important League, our contract had no teeth in it. Our major grievance was the division of proceeds from the sale of our plays for motion pictures, and in the matter of this vested interest the managers were adamant. General practice gave the manager half of these proceeds, but frequently he claimed more, and the type of deception Al Woods had attempted with my *Roads of Destiny* was so common as to have become almost respectable.

Speaking for myself, I have never been able to see why the presentation of a play with living actors gave the manager a better right to a share of payment for the use of that play in films than it gave him to kiss your wife. The manager's only business was presentation with living actors, and license for this was all he had ever purchased. Publishers of magazines and books had claimed no rights except those of publication—and of publication only in the books or magazines they themselves published. There are arguments on both sides of this question, of course, and this is no place for them. The serious problem for us was that most of our number agreed with the producers—exactly as later most of the others opposed my fight against frivolous charges of plagiarism, which led to my resignation from the Council of the League. A large part of our organization might have called itself the Authors' Aid Society for Indignant Managers.

Late in the summer of 1919 growing friction between actors and their employers culminated in an unprecedented and astonishing strike that closed every theater in New York. The rebels organized the Actors' Equity Association and joined the Federation of Labor. As with us, there was a division of opinion that created a rival but short-lived group called Fidelity, to which Cohan and Harris sent their check for \$100,000. Equity pleaded for a solid supporting front from authors, but it was denied, though many of

us realized that our interests were seriously involved. August 18, 1919, "Eugene Walter and Avery Hopwood, as individuals"—I quote from the *Authors' League Bulletin* of September 1919—"sent broadcast a telegram calling a meeting of their fellows for August 19th at the Astor Hotel. . . . They decided to form an organization to be called the Stage Writers' Protective Association. . . . Channing Pollock, who like Cincinnatus had come from the plow, suggested the folly and waste of two organizations where only one was required. The purpose of the Stage Writers' Protective Association was identical with that of the Authors' League. . . . Mr. Pollock suggested that, foreseeing the emergency, he had asked and secured power to form a Dramatists' Committee in the League. Leroy Scott promised ready admission to those present who were not members of the League. The proposal was voted down five times, but Mr. Pollock and Mr. Scott persisted, and on August 25th it was accepted by a unanimous vote. Mr. Pollock thereupon offered to resign his chairmanship, created by the League, and let the new group elect its own chairman, but on a motion made by Augustus Thomas and carried unanimously, he was retained in the chair."

Frankly, I had seized this long-awaited opportunity to form an organization of authors strong enough to end the abuses from which they suffered. This organization did not begin to function, however, until six years later in 1925, when the weakness of our body, which had little power to enforce its decisions, terminated in one of the most revolutionary movements in the history of art and letters—the Dramatists' Guild in the Authors' League of America. The Guild began with 112 members, and its success led to a new constitution by which, as the United States consists of partly autonomous states, the League now consists of various guilds of authors, dramatists, and writers for screen and radio. The story may be of interest only to practitioners of these crafts, and is continued here briefly and solely because it seems to me a dramatic and significant part of one of the principal conflicts of our time.

Many of the managers felt a degree of the contempt for authors still entertained in Hollywood, and sought to increase rather than diminish their share of revenue from motion-picture rights. Then

as now most of them hoped to operate without investing a penny of their own, but on capital supplied by the picture industry *in return for the very movie rights the manager acquired by reason of his investment*. In 1925 a film producer, afterward sentenced to the penitentiary for another offense, converted a group of our leading impresarios to the idea of transferring these rights to him *before* they were acquired. There was to be no competition in the open market; the film producer was to back the managers, and, unknown to the author, as *quid pro quo* was to receive an option on every play presented under the agreement.

This was a swindle so special that I doubt being able to make it clear or interesting to laymen. Suppose we put it this way: You have built an apartment house, and lease it to me. In order to pay you, and before the lease has been signed or I have acquired any rights whatever in your building, I sell the whole structure to a contractor who wants to turn it into a factory. With the proceeds of this sale for a time I make use of your house, paying you a share of what it earns for me, and when your property passes to the contractor I generously give you a portion of the purchase price—a price in the setting of which you have had no voice.

Documentary evidence of the proposed deal came into my hands, and I saw that it was do-or-die for the dramatists in the League. Our membership had grown rapidly, but no one could say how much of it was dependable. If any considerable number failed to see our danger, or were unwilling to struggle against it, the rest of us could easily be put out of business. Our only chance lay in acquainting a very few with our plans until we could safely tell a few more, and so on. Accordingly, three of us met secretly at the home of a fourth. The accredited historian of the movement, George Middleton, writes, "As records were not officially kept of several early meetings of this group, names cannot be accurately supplied." However, our host that evening was Cosmo Hamilton, dramatist brother of Sir Phillip Gibbs, and his guests were the trio that had blitzkrieged Sam Harris—James Forbes, Owen Davis and I.

Inevitably, of course, a hint of our activities got about, and the opposing forces began the usual sniping. William Fox, who had paid \$150,000 for the movie rights for my play, *The Fool*, was negotiating with its manager, Crosby Gaige, for similar rights in

my next play, *The Enemy*. Gaige told me, "Fox won't buy your play unless you drop out of this movement." Of course I replied that the play was for sale, but my soul wasn't. The same type of approach was made to most of our group, and it failed in every instance. Our second meeting, in the office of Gene Buck, President of ASCAP,\* added to our original quartette Buck himself, George Middleton, Arthur Richman, Rita Weiman, and one or two others. By then we were committed to what we called the Dramatists' Shop, and what many others have called a "closed shop." We pledged ourselves to deal with no manager who failed to sign our basic agreement, and managers who did sign thus pledged themselves to deal with no author outside our group. The likeness to the closed shop of the labor unions is admitted; the chief difference was—and is—that we were not a labor union producing goods essential to the community; that we adopted none of the methods that have brought certain unions into disrepute, and finally, that anyone who wished could join our body, at any time, and with dues amounting to little or nothing. No officer of the Guild receives a salary, and as the League is incorporated, all its transactions are matters of public record.

With Arthur Richman as president of the Guild, and me as chairman, the first formal meeting of the conspirators took place, still secretly, December 7, 1925, in the rooms of Actors' Equity. Thirty-three men and women were present, and when I asked those willing to sign our agreement to rise, thirty-two stood. In as dramatic a moment as occurs in most plays, I requested the only person seated to give his reason. He declined. Thereupon, I inquired whether he would promise to divulge nothing he had heard at the meeting. This he declined also, and, in a dead silence of contempt I asked him to leave the room. This man, now one of our leading dramatists, afterward joined the Guild, of course, and, unless I am mistaken, served on its council.

The history of the movement after that meeting is a matter of record and common knowledge among those concerned. It is related briefly and far too modestly in his autobiography, *City Lawyer*, by Arthur Garfield Hays, who as our first counsel was of inestimable service to the Guild. The Authors' League publishes a

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\*The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.



full account of "The Dramatists' Guild," by Middleton, who went abroad in its behalf and recruited every stage writer of note in Europe. By 1939 the membership of the Guild was 1,687; no American manager has produced any play by an author who is not a member, nor has any member dealt with a manager who had not signed our Minimum Basic Agreement. I have heard no complaint as to abuse of our power, and I do not believe that any author *or* manager would willingly return to the conditions in this field that existed prior to 1925.

Though I no longer write plays, I remain a part of the Dramatists' Guild and the Authors' League of America, as I retain membership in the equivalent societies in England and France. Through these I have made many of my best friends. Also, as stated, I retired from active participation in the affairs of the Guild after failing to win the League's backing for legislation by which I proposed to ease the burden of suits alleging plagiarism. In England, I believe, these suits are admitted to trial only after the presiding judge has read both manuscripts, without hearing evidence or counsel on either side, and found justifying cause for action. The same sort of law here would not really change our procedure, since even now verdicts depend chiefly on the conclusions so reached, but it would enormously reduce costs, and prevent punishment of the obviously innocent. For the first, and, I think, the last time, the new system of guilds produced a conflict of interests in the League. The novelists and story writers whose work is printed and available feared sticky fingers in Hollywood; the dramatists, whose work is not printed, and *not* available, until after production, and who are usually victims of these suits, had an opposite concern. Naturally, I thought the dramatists right, and especially since the plaintiff's case is not prejudiced by the proposed statute. I regarded the veto of the League as highhanded, but no resentment explained my resignation from its Council. By 1926 I was even more occupied than I had been before, and after eleven years' service in the cause of authorship, I felt that Cincinnatus might go back to his plow.

## I FALL IN LOVE AGAIN

WHEN I was thirty years old I learned to play. In my childhood I had been far more interested in books than in games, and our frequent peregrinations prevented close friendships with other children. At an age when most young people, and especially those of this generation, are going in for dances and athletic sports, I worked constantly, and have continued to do so. Even now I have had only three idle Sundays in my life, and they were ordered by a physician.

Except for work I had no idea of enjoyment, and no proficiency. I boxed and played handball, not for pleasure but to keep fit, and my wife insists that I still swim or play tennis as though these were tasks to be done as well and quickly as possible, and got out of the way. Swimming I mastered at twenty-five, and characteristically. I was spending an afternoon with Lottie Blair Parker, author of *Way Down East*, and her husband Harry Doel Parker, and was chagrined at being the only person present not able to take care of himself in the water. "Jump off the dock," Harry said, "and you'll swim all right."

I jumped, went to the bottom, and stayed there. "Something's wrong," I thought; "I ought to come to the surface three times." I pulled myself out by the piling, and taking a life preserver, went off alone to a quiet corner of the ocean, where in half an hour I acquired the art. I should say, "where I learned how to propel myself while floating," since my swimming still violates all form. It gets me where I want to go, nevertheless. Youthful masters of the "crawl" pass me in the first fifty yards, but I can never find them at the end of a mile. After twenty years I discovered a

method of breathing that is taught every beginner. In the same way, when the income tax made it necessary, by long trial and error I worked out my own system of bookkeeping—which the first government accountant assured me was “ordinary double-entry.”

Marriage made little difference in my habits, since my wife worked as hard as I did, but our cottage by the sea finally seduced me. No one can have an ocean in his front yard and a beach at his feet, and week-end guests to be entertained, without beginning to think of boats and rackets and fishing tackle. I constructed a tennis court on top my sea wall and began spending my late afternoons there, and in a canoe, and in the water—as I do now. I still play the worst game of tennis ever seen, but I can beat almost everyone except Arthur Garfield Hays, who has an injured leg and a will to win that overcomes all handicaps.

At thirty-six I fell in love again—madly, passionately, beyond the control of reason; like a college boy with his first chorus girl. In *The Lady from Oklahoma*, Elizabeth Jordan's heroine says, “He ain't just my husband; he's all the children I never had.” The object of my desire was not just a boat; she was all the fun I never had. Three times I have loved at first sight—my wife, my place in the country, and this small yacht. Originally I saw her picture in a magazine advertisement. Then I went to her home in a shipyard at Bayonne, New Jersey. After that I was lost. I could think of nothing else. I have always been boat-crazy, whether the vessel is a canoe, a catboat, a freighter or a luxury liner. My feeling for the old *Aquitania*, aboard which my wife and daughter and I made so many voyages that we knew every bolt and cabin boy, became celebrated, but that was affection, and this was infatuation. I had a chauffeur in 1916, and I used to send him off with the car so I couldn't drive to Bayonne—and then I would cave in and go by train. Finally my wife said, “You'd better buy the boat, and get it out of your system”—and I did both.

She was a cabin cruiser, fifty feet overall, with a large galley, a dining saloon with Pullman berths for four, an engine room containing two bunks for the crew, a master's room with two ordinary beds, and ample deck space. Her cost, nearly new, was \$5,000, and she was cheap at the price. I put almost as much again into

glass, china, linen and blankets, all marked with her private signal, and into uniforms, deck furniture, landing mats and other gadgets. Then, I became panic-stricken, and hired only a captain—a Norwegian named Rasmussen—when I should have had a cook and steward as well. That didn't matter much. As my family can be seasick in a hammock, and loathes boats as fervently as I love them, my chief companion was our oldest friend, William E. Graham, who spent most of his life at sea, and can cook better than many professionals. I christened my vessel the *Perfect Lady*, after a play Wolf and I had written for Rose Stahl—though my wife thought we should call her the *Follies of 1916*.

From the beginning we were out of luck. I joined the Columbia Yacht Club, and on our first voyage there my daughter carried enough finery to dazzle every yachtsman in America. Unfortunately, as she went to her cabin to dress we entered "Ferry-boat Lane" in the East River, where we pitched and tossed in the wash from these monsters. Where I expected to see a juvenile combination of Circe, Cleopatra and Lillian Russell, as we cast anchor at the club there emerged a pale, yellow-green wraith, very uncertain as to feet and stomach, and with her modish hat tilted over one ear. That was Helen's last venture aboard the *Perfect Lady*.

For the first and only time in my recollection the price of gasoline rose to thirty cents—and we burned a gallon a mile. With every deck chair filled, we used to cruise up Long Island Sound, with the guests remarking, "Isn't it lovely?" while I muttered, "Thirty, sixty, ninety, a dollar twenty." I *had* to keep count, and someone has said truly that when you must ask whether you can afford anything, *you can't*.

Though Wolf and I worked desperately we had no production in 1916, and determined as always not to dip deeply into my savings, I let the *Lady* lie in harbor at Port Jefferson through most of that summer while I played the typewriter ten hours a day at Shoreham to keep her. In October Bill and I defied storm warnings and our captain to set sail for New York in a violent northeaster. That voyage was what I had in mind when, in a preceding chapter, I wrote of the intoxication of a head wind and a choppy sea. We had nothing to eat or drink all day, since the galley was afloat; we never got out of the oilskins hastily donned over our pajamas, and

we reached port without the lifeboat, deck awnings, and much of the superstructure with which we started—but Bill and I never have been or will be so joyously drunk. That night the *Perfect Lady* went to Bayonne for repairs and winter storage, and next morning an official at the shipyard phoned to say, "There's a man here who's fallen in love with your boat and offers to buy her at exactly the price you paid."

"Where is the *Lady* now?" I asked.

"Being hauled up the ways."

"Cut the rope," I said, "and let her slide right back into that guy's arms."

Bill and I both shed a few tears over the *Lady*, my wife smiled the smile of Mona Lisa, and since then I have confined my voyaging to canoes and vessels for which one buys tickets. Nevertheless, Bill and I are going to have another ship some day. We "window-shop" at every motorboat show, climb in and out of the exhibits, raise unjustified hopes in the salesmen, and depart with plans that are not all printed in our pocketful of catalogues.

The *Perfect Lady* provided two unforgettable experiences. The first was sheer lunacy. On a red-hot Fourth of July Bill and I lounged on the afterdeck, wondering what to do with ourselves. We were anchored in Greenport Harbor, and so were a dozen warships of assorted sizes and the North Atlantic Squadron. For the twentieth time I was listening to our only phonograph record—it was Kreisler's "Caprice Viennois"—while Bill read *Yachting Regulations*. Suddenly he said, "Gosh! Did you know we're supposed to salute every naval vessel we pass, and—get this—*they've got to return the salute*."

"Wonderful!" I agreed. "Captain, start the engines; we're going to cruise 'round the fleet!"

We began with a super-dreadnaught. Approaching her, I saluted by dipping our flag—a simple process, as I was perched on the after rail with the halyards in hand. What happened aboard the super-dreadnaught was less simple. The battleship suddenly teemed with life. Men ran along her decks and scampered up her rigging. Bosuns' whistles blew, and captains, rear-admirals and admirals shouted orders from the bridge. I'm not sure someone didn't wire-

less for instructions from Washington. Duly saluted, we passed on to the next warship—a destroyer. We had ruined the afternoon for the personnel of about a third of the North Atlantic Squadron, and laughed ourselves into exhaustion, when Rasmussen reported “a hunch that if we bother just one more boat, they’ll blow us into eternity.” Accordingly, we slipped out of the harbor and spent the night at New London. I hadn’t enjoyed myself so much since the evening of Olga Nethersole’s New York opening in *Sappho*, when Bill had provided another fantastic experience. *Sappho* dealt with a luxurious lady of uneasy virtue, and, contemplating her, Bill declared that if in his next incarnation he chanced to be feminine, he certainly would adopt her remunerative profession. When I insisted that he had no reason to anticipate Sappho’s success, but probably would have to be content with the patronage of sailors and dock hands, Bill was insulted and finally left me in a rage because I wouldn’t let him be an expensive courtesan!

From the second experience I really learned something. With six guests I had embarked for Bar Harbor, and we were fogbound at Gloucester. Day after day we lay in the harbor, listening to conversation aboard a sloop anchored near us. We never saw the boat or her passengers, a bride and groom who had used their savings for this honeymoon. The man had a week off before reporting at his office, and his time and money were being spent in a prison of gray walls. However, I don’t think they minded much. Of course they heard our conversation, too, and, on the fifth morning, when the mist was lifting a little, they blew a farewell to us on their whistle and groped their way to the open sea. . . . How many people are near us in the fog of life; unknown, beyond reach, and yet vaguely kin to us in their joys and sorrows.

My own time was growing short. Every month I had to send a five-thousand-word article to the *Green Book*, and now I was within a very few days of the date for delivery. The fog that had lifted a little shut down again, and I decided we must abandon the boat and go home by train. Ready cash had run so low that I had only enough for the seven railway tickets. As we went over the side and into the dinghy, Rasmussen asked, “How about money?”

“How about it?” I answered.

“I need some money,” he said.

"That," I replied, "is a remarkable coincidence; so do I."

My Norwegian captain, who could do almost everything but swim and detect a joke, was bewildered. "How am I going to bring the boat back without money?" he persisted.

"Who told you to bring her back?"

"Don't you want her back?"

"Certainly not. I don't care if I never see her again."

"What shall I do with her?"

"That," I concluded, "is for you to decide," and we pushed off, leaving a very able seaman to wonder whether I had gone quite mad.\*

By ferry from Bridgeport to Port Jefferson, I reached Shoreham at six o'clock Monday evening, and my 5,000 words had to be in the mail by noon Tuesday. I was furious at myself, and my rage spilled over into my manuscript. "Success is the greatest obstacle in the path to success," I wrote. "It is not the first rungs of the ladder that are hard to climb. This explains why so many men get halfway up, and so few all the distance. There begin to be so many joys and cares and distractions. Why go higher? It is very agreeable here. One halts, and hesitates, and is happy. Life gets to be so full of complications as one progresses, so full of what one doesn't want, though one struggled hard enough to get it, and so barren of what one does want, and didn't try for. The youth and energy and faith and hope and happiness that go to win The Great God Success!

"And when the Great God is won—

"Great God!"

This was my revolt against having learned to play; against what seemed to me then the waste of time in pleasure and possessions. I christened my essay "The Great God Success," and posted it before noon on Tuesday. Then, suffering the usual reaction, I read my carbon copy. It was full of careless writing, unpolished and tautological. That afternoon I wired my editor, Ray Long, "Article sent you today not up to my standard. Please consign it to wastebasket and leave me out of next issue." Ray didn't reply. I thought

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\*I forgot to say that, a week later, Rasmussen reappeared with the *Perfect Lady*. He had got credit from everyone en route, including the collectors at the Cape Cod Canal, and I was a whole afternoon writing checks to cover his return.

him justly annoyed, and rather expected him to cancel my contract. The October *Green Book* appeared with a cover largely devoted to announcement of "The Great God Success." Congratulations came to me from all over the country, a collector bought the original manuscript, and the piece prompted considerable newspaper comment including a long editorial in the *Chicago Tribune*. I had won my first spurs as an essayist with 5,000 words written in a few hours, at white heat, in an effort I had regarded as wholly contemptible.

Nearly twenty years later, when Ray was editor of the *Cosmopolitan*, he asked me to do this piece over again for him. No one would remember it now, he said, and the material was too good to be lost. This time I devoted a fortnight to the job. I wrote, and rewrote, and revised and amplified, and finally turned in a manuscript entitled "I Want to Live in a Lighthouse," that, duly published in the *Cosmopolitan*, was never heard from again. There wasn't even a ripple in the backwash of the tidal wave that had followed the original printing. But even now I get an occasional word about "The Great God Success." A quarter of a century after its appearance, a physician in Columbus, Ohio, wrote me quoting from the article, which, he said, he had never forgotten.

There are two lessons in this, I think: First, an author *must* touch the experience of his readers. As Charlie Klein warned me, there's no use writing "about the man who goes up in a balloon"; one must echo everyday hopes and fears, and the more nearly universal these are, and the more deeply rooted, the more nearly an author approaches accomplishment of his mission. The stir made by "The Great God Success" indicated nothing except that thousands of men and women—perhaps millions—had experienced my own dissatisfaction with purely material achievement, and were blaming themselves, as I had done. This groping for things of the mind and spirit in our country has been in direct proportion to our loss of them, and was never more evident than now, when we have been brought face to face with the consequences. However, I have never appealed to the best in my readers or audiences, in articles, books, plays or lectures, without warm and immediate response.

The second lesson, perhaps, concerns only my fellow craftsmen, and yet I think it may have a wider pertinence. It is: Don't



be too meticulous. Eagerness and fervor and spontaneity may be polished out of a manuscript, leaving only something elegant, flawless, and unarresting. My wife, who is a perfectionist, is forever complaining that I do not give enough time to any piece of work; that I write under what I have called "forced draft," and usually send out what I have done while it is still hot. Yet my closest approaches to success have been made in that way, and I have learned to be very cautious about revision and "polishing." Most of the greatest and most enduring literary works have been produced under "forced draft"; Shakespeare wrote to fill the stage of a theater he managed that consumed plays faster than he could provide them, as Dickens wrote to keep magazines supplied with instalments and Scott to satisfy his creditors. Of course this does not apply to fields in which form is all-important. Even in painting and sculpture, however, perfection defeats itself, prompts admiration and not emotion. It is the *imperfections* of Rodin's Aged Courtesan that stir us, not the smooth faultlessness of the Greek Slave.

In spite of my playing I did an immense amount of work in those years, and I think it was better work. I won't say that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," because that depends on Jack—and the job. Some work *is* play. However, moderation and relaxation and a mixture of interests are helpful, and, especially, the more one knows about everything the greater and more satisfying one's output. This, of course, is particularly true of authors. I have never regretted an experience, agreeable or otherwise, and most of them have served me well. An introspective author grows so conscious of this gain that he becomes fearful of the genuineness of his emotions. I recall a rainy afternoon in a room in which a friend I loved was dying. Across the courtyard a phonograph was playing a gay tune, and I could see a woman dancing a child on her knee. Suddenly I found myself more interested in dramatizing the contrast than in the fate of my friend; dramatizing even my own sorrow at his passing. The experience frightened me. The writer's instinct can become a Frankenstein.

Besides the plays mentioned, during my first years at Shoreham I produced a number of short stories and articles for magazines,

and a quantity of light verse, printed chiefly in *Life*, *Munsey's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Some of this verse was pretty good; I still hear echoes of "The Little Boy I Never Had" and "A Miserere of Middle Age." Also, I published a volume of essays on the theater, *The Footlights, Fore and Aft*, that was dedicated to my wife under the pseudonym I had popularized through the *Green Book*—"The Lady Who Goes to the Theater with Me." Chiefly, I think, I was groping for the kind of play I had wanted to write since I first set pencil to paper. The last of my "alibis" had ceased to exist. By 1919 *Roads of Destiny* and *The Crowded Hour* had completed my financial security. Long before then my wife had resigned the last of her positions, at the old Hippodrome, and settled down to happy domesticity in what remained a modest but had become our charming and comfortable home at Shoreham. Our winters were spent in New York, or in travel, but we had left our hotel rooms in the St. Francis and leased an adequate apartment at the corner of Broadway and Eighty-third Street. I had established myself as a dramatist, and not only felt sure of ready production for anything I wrote, but actually had a contract guaranteeing it.

*Roads of Destiny* and *The Crowded Hour* had been an advance, but I cherished very definite ideas of the province of a real dramatist. In a magazine article printed in 1917, I had said, "We must have all sorts of plays, of course. There is room in the theater for nonsense, and violent physical action, and what is called 'entertainment'—but why can't audiences be entertained by use of their mental faculties as well as by their suspension? There must be room, too, for discussion of vital subjects, for the clash of ideas, and plays that urge the eternal verities. It seems to me that the task of the true dramatist is to translate the best thought into action, to reduce it to terms understood by the average man; to dramatize it and make it interesting to him. . . . I suggest that the first type of play comes of the sprightliness and virility of youth, and the second from the experience and reflection of maturity. At forty, an author should find something better to do than turn pin wheels to amuse a lazy-minded multitude."

I had been writing a good deal in opposition to the flood of filth in books and plays that came with and after the war, and to the so-called "sophistication" that was robbing us of aspiration and

standards. Naturally my mind reverted to the question I had asked myself in Washington: "What would happen to the man who, in this day and age, tried to live like Christ?" He would lose everything, I thought, and gain everything. All around were the gains of our material civilization, and of the lush prosperity that followed the war, and what was their real value? That loss of everything which seemed so terrible might be the only way to avert a worse bankruptcy. Much of the mood that created "The Great God Success" explained these reflections, and they were underscored by all I saw and read. There was nothing new in them—there had been nothing new when Jesus asked, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"—but was there ever a time of greater need for being reminded of fundamental truth?

Through most of the summer that followed completion of *The Crowded Hour*, my wife and I sought a way to make this reminder dramatic and emotionally compelling. As Thomas A. Edison had suggested to me in my youth, most people do not think; they can be swayed only through emotion. *That*, I decided, was one "province of the dramatist"—perhaps the chief one. Preachers preached and teachers taught, but the dramatist could and should preach *and* teach without seeming to do either. A first-rate play was not a dissertation on, but a dramatization of the author's deepest convictions. I have a Bible at Shoreham that was given me by Basil King, and which is almost illegible because of my annotations and interlinings. How were these pronouncements to be translated into terms of today, and put into action that would move and persuade a multitude to whom they were only smooth words intoned on Sundays?

We returned to town before I had solved the problem, and then, in fervent enthusiasm, I took my scenario to Al Woods. Al had produced *Roads of Destiny* and had agreed to produce my next two plays whether he liked them or not. He was sailing for Europe on one of those voyages he decided upon the evening before and undertook with no baggage except a toothbrush. I paced his office in the Eltinge Theater while Al leaned back in a swivel chair with both feet on his desk. When I had outlined my story and its proposed treatment, Al rose and put a paternal hand on my shoulder. "What you need, sweetheart," he said, "is a good rest. At this min-

ute, one of us is crazy, and I don't think I'm the one. Anyway, I'm not crazy enough to risk my money on that religious bunk. I'll be home again in a few weeks; take a rest and then meet me at the steamer with a play that makes sense." Suddenly the light of inspiration came into his eyes. "Something about a streetwalker that reforms a crook. Listen; here's the idea: You're a lousy thief that would rob little children, and Rose [that was his wife] is a bum tart that falls in love with you. I'm a pimp that's been living on Rose, and when I find that you two bastards—"

That was Al's habitual method of telling a story and making it vivid. It was an effective method, too, and this was a good story, of its kind—but I went home and resumed work on *The Fool*.

## ONE MORE FALSE STEP

WOODS was returning from Europe one Monday morning in the spring of 1919, and all the preceding Sunday I sat at my desk wondering with what play I was to meet him at the steamer. My winter's work on *The Fool* hadn't gone too well—perhaps because of the shock of learning that even an impresario committed to gambling on my next two manuscripts wouldn't produce it. In these circumstances, I had small reason for hope of production by a manager with less faith in me, and as I have remarked frequently, authors must live.

No new story I was able to invent seemed likely to please Woods, and at noon I resorted to those that had been written for, and declined by Metro Films. Of these, the most promising seemed *The Come-Back*. I had sketched a rough scenario, which left me rather cold, when Arthur Somers Roche, the novelist, phoned to ask whether I would run over to the Majestic Hotel for a cocktail and to give him some advice about a plot that was proving recalcitrant. After I had taken the cocktail and given the advice, I repeated to Arthur the story of *The Come-Back*. He liked it, and at eleven the next morning Woods called from his office to say: "Hello, sweetheart. I had sleuths on your trail, and they tell me you got a whirlwind of a play." The sleuths, of course, were Arthur Roche, who was with Woods at the moment, and two hours later by Al's own method I was relating my story over luncheon at the Knickerbocker: "I'm a big cattleman from the West, Rose is my wife, and you're the so-and-so who's after my daughter."

"Great!" Woods exclaimed. "How long will it take you to write it?"

I said I'd move to Shoreham the end of the week and bring back a completed manuscript in September.

"No, you don't!" Al insisted. "Too much swimming and sky-larking at Shoreham. You'll stay in town until you finish this baby—which ought to be about a month from today."

It was exactly that. Never have I had a better example that what is written well is written easily. *The Come-Back*, which became *A Room at the Ritz* and then, because the Ritz threatened suit, *The Sign on the Door*, was the last and by far the most successful of my plays about nothing in particular. It had the advantage of years in my subconsciousness. The original idea, for a single situation, had occurred to me the first time I ever saw one of those "Do Not Disturb Me" placards in a hotel. This had developed into an extraordinary climax that actually played nine minutes without a spoken word. As I said later in a lecture at Harvard, there are only three possible starting points for a play: one may begin with a character, a situation or a thesis to be demonstrated. For years I had this situation and nothing else. I discussed it with other dramatists and got nowhere. Edgar Selwyn and Margaret Mayo thought it should be the beginning of the piece, but I knew it couldn't be "topped." Finally, for motion-picture purposes, I surrounded the situation with a rather machine-made story.

This story being commonplace, the virtue had to be in its telling. Eugene Walter had converted me to the "economical manuscript" when he challenged me to take ten words out of *The Easiest Way* without subtracting from its effect. In *The Sign on the Door* I did my utmost to duplicate Walter's feat; to write dialogue that should be almost telegraphic, and avoid characters or incidents that could be spared. Moreover, I tried to overcome the drawback of a trite tale by leading it into unexpected bypaths. During that luncheon at the Knickerbocker, Woods said, "The plays that fail are the plays that make one idea last an entire evening. Show me a play where, just as you're saying, 'Well, there couldn't be another twist to that,' you get a bunch of surprises, and I'll show you a hit." Sardou's gift for such developments has been discounted by critics who call it "sardoodle," but admiring his ingenuity, nevertheless, my hat was too small for my head several days after A. B. Walkley, in the *London Times*, began his review of my melodrama

with: "Twenty years we have looked to Paris for another Sardou, and last night he came from New York."

*The Sign*, I believe, was the first American play to be presented in every country that boasts a stage, and it failed only in Paris. I have related that Al Woods never read the completed work, or saw it until its first night, and how he engaged Lowell Sherman for the role of Devereaux, which Lowell had refused to play and which doubled his salary in one season. The piece opened in Atlantic City late in 1919, with Mary Ryan as Ann, Lee Baker as "Lafe" Regan and Lowell as Devereaux, and was to have had tryout engagements elsewhere before risking Broadway. After the first performance in Atlantic City Al said, "I don't see anything to be done to the play, do you?" and when I replied in the negative, proposed heading straight for New York. That frightened me, and Al suggested, "I'll phone you tomorrow night. If box-office receipts fall off at the second performance, we'll go to Trenton; if they increase, will you open in town on Thursday?" The second performance was "standing room only," and our season at the Republic Theater began two evenings later, December 19, 1919.

On March 15, 1920, for the first time in my career in the theater, we "changed horses in midstream." Mary Ryan was giving a noteworthy performance as Ann, and her husband, Sam Forrest, had been of inestimable value in staging the piece, but Woods had a contract with Marjorie Rambeau under which she drew salary whether she was acting or not. A failure left her with nothing to do, and Woods decided to use her in *The Sign on the Door*. The theater is a heartbreaking profession, and as had been true of Julia Dean and Willette Kershaw, poor Mary suffered through no fault of her own. The change in the leading role made no difference at the box office, and after a long season in New York my melodrama reaped a rich harvest on the road. My experience has been that "the play's the thing," and that the public cares little who plays it so long as the playing is adequate. Of my thirty-one productions, only three were written for stars, and the most successful featured no particular actor. No star can do business without a satisfactory play, and not more than half a dozen add much to returns even then. The reverse is true in the movies, where the producers have built up a system that costs them millions in tower-

ing salaries, and leaves them at the mercy of mediocrities whose power they have created. The whim of an actress ended the prosperity of one play of mine, and I took care never to put myself in that position again. Very recently a musical comedy was closed at the height of its success because the star wanted a vacation, and it seems to me folly to stake months of time, a fortune in money, and the fate of an enterprise and those it supports on the caprice of a single player.

Attached to the screen in my study is a photograph of Gladys Cooper on which she wrote, "In memory of a very happy time." The inscription refers to her appearance in *The Sign on the Door* in London, which certainly was one of the happiest times either of us will ever know. I had spent the winter of 1920-1921 with my family in North Africa and Egypt, and the following spring and early summer in Paris and London. Reaching New York on a Thursday morning and motoring straight to Shoreham, we devoted the day to opening our summer home—a considerable job—and that night Al Woods telephoned that I must sail immediately to produce *The Sign* in London. I protested that I had just *left* London, but Al had signed a contract with Frank Curzon that included my services as director, and merely laughed at my insistence that I *wasn't* a director and didn't want to be one. We spent Friday closing the house we had opened, and at midnight returned to the cabins we had just vacated in the *Aquitania*. Eleven days after embarking at Southampton we were back at the same pier and the Savoy Hotel.

There used to be two accepted types of Englishman—the haw-haw and monocled type of Gus Thomas' *The Earl of Pawtucket*, and the tall, broad-shouldered, intrepid and rigorously honest type familiarized by Kipling. I never saw an actual example of the first variety, and I can remember only two of the second. These two were Captain Sir James Charles of the *Aquitania*, and Frank Curzon. Both stood six feet two in their stockings, were of corresponding beam, and as simple, bluff and reliable as St. Bernards. Captain Charles, of whose death I have written, worshiped Kipling and used to give me his collected poems every Christmas—usually with an inscription reading, in effect, "I'm not sure whether you have



this book, but you *should* have it." He had been at sea all his life, beginning in sailing ships, and when he dined with us one night, turned his back on Sir Joseph Duveen and other distinguished persons invited to meet him, devoting the evening to discussing "sea pie" and days before the mast with Bill Graham, who also had started in sailing ships. Jimmie was a martinet, but his men adored him. I had given part of the crew's library to the *Aquitania*, and knew everybody aboard. When I crossed in her a fortnight after Jimmie's death a dozen of her personnel tried to talk to me about him, and left me abruptly to hide their tears. Sir James was as gentle as he was courageous. When a storm prevented his attending the New York opening of my play, *The Enemy*, and he wirelessly "Delayed by this damned ocean," I printed the telegram and got Jimmie rebuked by the Cunard. I deserved a thrashing, but, reporting the experience, Jimmie merely wrote me, "You shouldn't have done that."

Frank Curzon, who had reduced me to speechlessness—an unparalleled feat—when he came into the office where I worked for William A. Brady, was then the foremost manager in England. He was almost a giant, a great eater and drinker, and the first man I ever saw go about the streets without hat or overcoat. I met him in Gilbert Miller's flat the night of my return to London, and saw him only twice during rehearsals of *The Sign*. One of those occasions was ominous. Regan shoots Devereaux during the third act, and I wanted the muzzle of the revolver pressed into the victim's belly. That would have been dangerous; many actors are injured by the wadding discharged from blank cartridges. I conceived the idea of a pistol with its muzzle sealed, and the opening invisible in the "upstage" side of the barrel—the side turned away from the auditorium. As this proved practical, I had a dozen of these pistols made and took two to London. I didn't know English law forbids importation of weapons without a license, and Curzon and I were both worried when an inspector called to demand my presence at Scotland Yard. The call interrupted a rehearsal, and as we left the theater, Frank warned me, "This is serious. We don't ignore laws in England."

Facing a stern official at Scotland Yard, I saw no way to avoid prison until my inquisitor read me the statute as to importing

"weapons." Then inspiration came to my rescue. "How do you define a 'weapon'?" I asked.

"A weapon," the official answered, "is an instrument made to injure or kill."

"Exactly," I said, "and, as this pistol was manufactured expressly to make injury or killing impossible, it certainly is *not* a weapon."

I was released promptly and Frank wrung my hand in admiration and gratitude. Curzon's only real interest at that time was his racing stable at New Market, and nothing short of emergency brought him to London. When I found the leading man he had engaged quite hopeless, I telephoned New Market and begged Frank to let me have Godfrey Tearle. "You're asking a lot," Curzon said. "I've got to pay the present incumbent £50 a week as long as the play runs, whether he's in it or not, and on top of that you want me to pay £100 for Tearle."

I suggested, "I'll pay the actor we're dismissing if you'll pay Tearle."

Frank consented and very luckily for us Godfrey was engaged for "Lafe" Regan. Of course I expected Curzon to deduct the £50 weekly from the royalties sent me, but he never did, and finally from America I wrote that I should like that amount subtracted every week rather than the whole sum at the end of the season. Frank replied: "I regret your mention of the only thing I ever did as a manager of which I am heartily ashamed. You gave us our greatest success at the Playhouse, and suggested that you be penalized for it. In a moment of weakness, I agreed. I have no intention of following that weakness with ingratitude, and shall be obliged if you do not mention the matter again." As *The Sign on the Door* packed the Playhouse almost a year, Frank's gift to me came to about \$12,000.

At these rehearsals I made the discovery, confirmed many times since, that no two actors and no two companies are subject to the same stage direction. I had always preferred having someone else direct my plays, and standing beside him to contribute whatever I could. Once or twice I had taken charge out of sheer necessity, but I had no faith in my ability to do so, and should have declined the job in a more or less strange land but for the belief that I could merely duplicate what had been done by Sam Forrest. That proved

impossible, first because the stage at the Playhouse was small and the settings quite different from those in New York, and chiefly because the actors were even more different. As Devereaux, Lowell Sherman had been a laughing devil, humorous, insolent and sinister, gaining his effects with the slightest movement or inflection. I shall never forget the impudent tone of his reply to Regan when "Lafe" said, "I can't kill you without getting into the newspapers, but I *can* give you a damned good licking," and taking off his hat, smiling and leaning against the door, Lowell answered, "I don't think you can."

Our English Devereaux, Leslie Faber, couldn't do that. He was a fine actor but incapable of insolence. Moreover, Faber grew angry as I kept urging him to imitate another player. Finally there was a blowup and he resigned. That afternoon I apologized to Leslie, he apologized to me, and all was well. "I behaved so badly," he said, "that I'm going to tell you what I have never said to anyone else. My nerves went to pieces in the war, and I've not always been accountable for my actions since then." The *amende honorable* of a fine artist and a great gentleman!

Gladys Cooper proved to be a very fine artist and a very great lady, but a still greater problem. She was then the most beautiful woman in England, as now, in middle age, I think her one of the most beautiful in America. In 1921 there was scarcely a shop window in the Strand without its picture of Miss Cooper, the toast and idol of London. She was a skilled actress, too, though her beauty prevented most people's thinking of that, but in 1921 she was colder than the proverbial cucumber. I had never met anyone else so indifferent and impersonal, and I am still astonished that, twenty years later, we are the warmest of friends. My wife's favorite joke is that if anything happened to her, Gladys would be one of the first two women I asked to marry me—if I didn't meet one or two other women friends on the way.

Coldness and indifference, however, threatened to destroy the climax of *The Sign on the Door*. In this scene nine minutes of silent action end with ten words spoken by Ann. After killing Devereaux, Ann's husband, Regan, finding the sign, "Do Not Disturb Me," just written by Devereaux, decides that the dead man can be made to appear a suicide. Carefully arranging the details, Regan

hangs the sign on the door and departs after locking that door behind him and throwing away the key. What Regan doesn't know is that his wife is in the next room and that he has imprisoned her with the dead body. Ann Regan's alternatives are to convict her husband or be convicted herself. Avoiding both, she overturns furniture, tears off her bodice, upsets the telephone, establishing communication with the hotel desk, and then fires two shots into the ceiling. When the authorities break in she cries, "I killed him! He attacked me and I killed him."

Obviously, this speech calls for the utmost in emotional tension—and we didn't get that from Miss Cooper. At a dress rehearsal there was a delay in breaking down the door, and waiting in great excitement and some anger, Gladys began pounding the table with the butt of the pistol and repeating her speech more and more loudly to make sure that the tardy invaders should hear it. When at last the door fell, Gladys had reached her top note and the end of her endurance. "That's it!" I exclaimed. "If you can do that tomorrow night, you'll knock 'em off their seats." Miss Cooper is too intelligent a woman and too gifted an actress not to have seen the point at once. We connected a small red light outside the door with a push button and instructed the two men not to break into the room until the light flashed. Then, push button in hand, I sat in the wings, watching and waiting. When I thought Gladys could go no further, I pressed the button, the door fell; on her top note Gladys repeated the speech she had been hysterically rehearsing—and, that first night in London, took nineteen curtain calls! If this seems like a trick, let me assure you that I never found another actress who could perform it, though I tried throughout Europe.

In spite of our luck in discovering this climax that dress rehearsal was the most discouraging of my experience. All of us left the theater shortly after midnight in a state of despair. Woods' agent, who walked home with me, found a good omen in a black cat that crossed our path. "It'll take more than any damned cat to make *this* play a hit," I said. The next evening, when Curzon asked where I'd be if the audience called "Author!" I answered that I'd be in the middle of the Thames. "Don't kid yourself that we've got a

success," I told Frank. Five minutes after the curtain rose we had *the* success of the season, and, indeed, of that year in Europe.

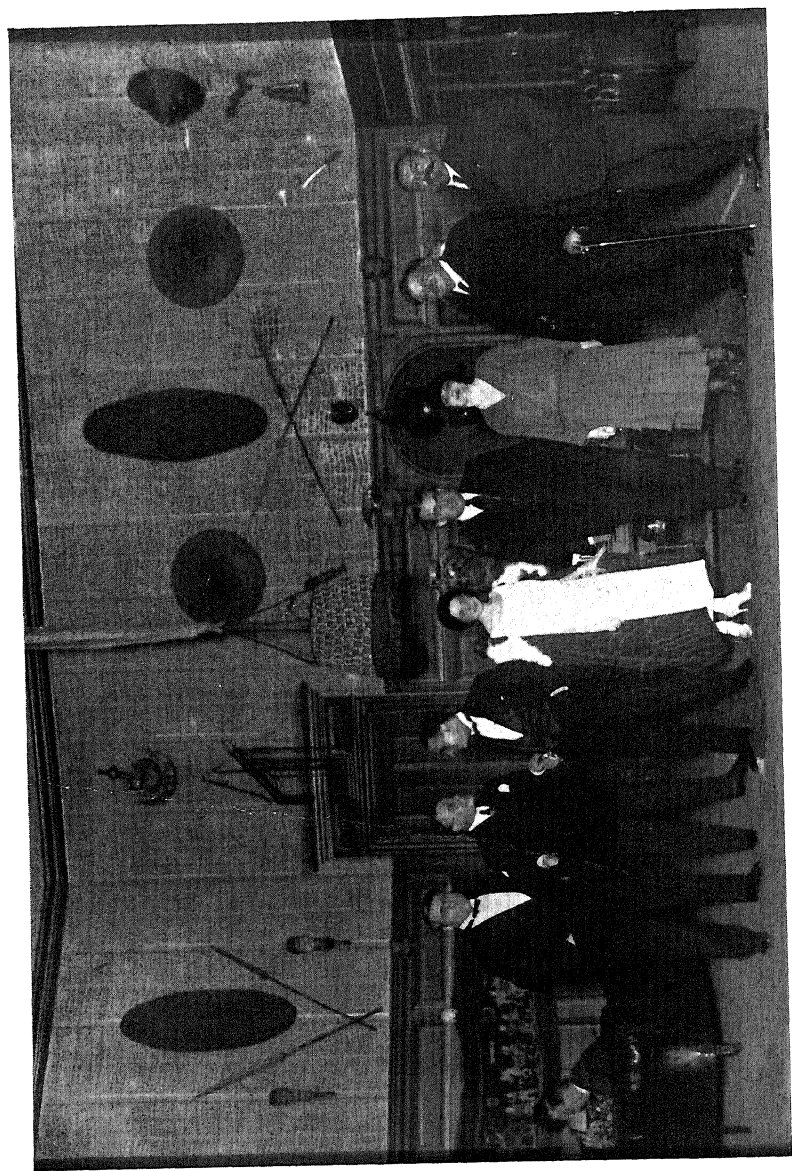
Success is a pleasant thing anywhere, and especially when one has expected failure, but I think nothing can quite equal the joy of success in London. Everyone seems so glad. At home the pace is faster and competition is keener; there is likely to be a tiny bit of envy and resentment in the heart of the man who, while he voices congratulations, is wondering why *you* should have won rather than he. Abroad, winning isn't quite so important. My friends in the League of British Dramatists—Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, and, most especially, Justin Huntly McCarthy—telephoned in exuberant delight. Notables I had never met came to my table in restaurants, or invited my wife and me to luncheon or dinner. When we attended *Chauve-Souris*, the manager, Charles Cochran, until then a stranger to me, sent an usher to ask me to go to his office for drinks and a pat on the back. My old comrade, James K. Hackett, called at two o'clock in the morning following our opening, and the next day in his home begged me to accompany him to Paris, where he was to acquire the Legion of Honor for his performance of *Macbeth*. Godfrey Tearle, our leading man, gave a dinner in my honor at which the menus were penned and illustrated by himself. On these menus, *Ciro's*, where the dinner took place, became the *Café Mazarin*, the scene of our prologue, and under the name of each dish appeared a quotation from our play that fitted it humorously. At the end of a week, I ran off to France to escape death from over-eating and being over-entertained.

Before breakfast on the day after this first night Woods' representative arrived in a state of wild enthusiasm. He was leaving for Berlin in an hour; if I would sign a letter authorizing him to deal for me, he was certain he could arrange productions of *The Sign* all over Europe. He was right, too. My mistake was that, without question, I affixed my signature to an agreement giving him power to act for me in the Central Empires, and though my play was successful throughout Germany and still holds the post-war record for a run in Vienna, I never received a penny for any of these performances. In contrast Director Royaards of the Royal Theater in Amsterdam ignored the fact that my copyright was not valid for the Netherlands and paid me liberally for every performance in Holland.



"SAINT CHANNING"

A cartoon of the author at the period of his play, "The Fool."



"THE SIGN ON THE DOOR" IN PARIS

Charles Boyer is third from the left, I am fifth, and second from the right is the Baron Henri de Rothschild.

In Paris *The Sign on the Door* was translated and presented by Baron Henri de Rothschild, then one of the wealthiest men in the world, and certainly one of the most interesting and charming friends I have ever made. Just before our acquaintance began the Baron had volunteered a gift of 1,000 francs to every couple married in France during the month of June. He and the Baroness, who remains my idea of a great lady, lived in a palace at Passy, just outside the city—a residence that reminded me of the Metropolitan Museum in New York though I think it was a little larger. There the Baron entertained us at banquets to which he invited millionaires and statesmen. It is—or was—characteristic of France that Henri wasn't the least astonished that my wife and I preferred continuing to live in our funny little old Hôtel Ste Marie at 83 Rue de Rivoli, which, the Baroness confided in me, was also the home of her maid's mother! To us at that hotel every morning the Rothschilds sent flowers from their greenhouse and a Rolls-Royce for our use. It is characteristic of France, too, that after a fortnight of this the proprietor of the Ste Marie doubled the price of our rooms. We had been "under cover" all these years, he thought; if we were so intimate with the Rothschilds we must be rich Americans, and it was simply silly to go on charging us at the rate we had been paying since 1907.

All the millionaires and statesmen we met at the Rothschilds made much the same mistake. Everywhere outside the United States an author is assumed to be a person of dignity and distinction, and I answered "no" so often when I was asked whether I knew "my dear friend, Mr. J. P. Morgan," or saw much of "my good companion of last year, Mr. John D. Rockefeller" that I was relieved when someone mentioned Otto Kahn and I could say that we were acquainted. At formal dinners at the Baron's every wine served was *announced* by the butler, but every guest also was furnished with a toothpick and used it—an old Spanish custom, as also French. Henri seemed to own at least some part of everything in France. He owned the theater in which we played—the *Théâtre de la Renaissance*. After dinner, presenting me to a drama critic, he requested me to say what I wanted written about my play; I suggested that wasn't being done, and Henri replied: "It is in this case. I own his newspaper."

In spite of this, *The Sign on the Door* was as great a failure in



Paris as it was a success in Brussels. Rothschild, who used the pen name André Pascal, and had written some capital plays of his own including *Le Caducée*, made an excellent adaptation—*Le Signe sur la Porte*—but we were defeated, I think, partly by the very climax that had been acclaimed everywhere else. In New York and London and Berlin a dramatic scene without dialogue represented ingenuity and careful building; in Paris, it merely suggested the cinema. Then, too, France resented outsiders. There could be no art or artists worth mentioning who were not French. The loss of the pre-eminence of the Parisian theater dates from the erection of an artistic Great Wall of China around France. Finally, *The Sign on the Door* had to do with what Americans called “the unwritten law,” and the French could not understand *that*. “I translated your play,” Rothschild confessed to me, “but one detail I do not comprehend. Regan kills Devereaux, but he is not even imprisoned. How is that possible?”

I explained that Devereaux had attempted Regan’s wife, and was attempting Regan’s daughter. In such circumstances juries frequently failed to convict.

Rothschild, who was a gay dog, looked at me in amazement. “But,” he said, “if that were true here, every man in Paris would be *shot*ed.”

England and Germany could understand that a rule or custom unknown in England or Germany might obtain elsewhere, but no real Frenchman ever admitted, even to himself, that anything not accepted in France was remotely possible in any other civilized country—if there existed any other civilized country.

The performance of my play in Paris ranked third; the best were in London and New York. Of course no one else ever touched the Devereaux of Lowell Sherman, who, within certain limitations, was a great actor. For Rothschild the part was played by Charles Boyer, who was just beginning to be known in Paris and is now famous in Hollywood. Boyer was an unusually charming young man. I shall not soon forget one night I spent in his company. At the Rothschilds’ I had met the Countess de la Salle, an Austrian, and Henri had asked me to take her to dinner and *The Sign on the Door*. Unluckily the engagement was made for May 1, when there wasn’t a taxi to be had in Paris. After long

search I acquired a vintage Ford, and in this decrepit rattlebox drove through the park gates to the doors of another palace, where I picked up the Countess.

On the way back, my guest said she was thirsty and suggested that we stop at a restaurant. We selected the nearest, a sidewalk café that proved to be patronized chiefly by actors. At an adjacent table sat Boyer, with Alcover, France Ellys and other members of our company. Very gay, they joined us, and to my horror Boyer slapped the Countess on the back and exclaimed the French equivalent of "Well, old girl, out for a night with your boy friend?" The lady loved it! The party continued until an hour before dawn, and even then I had difficulty persuading my Austrian to climb into the Ford and be driven home. I was rather more than half asleep. Freddy Lonsdale, the British author of light comedy, once told me the handicap to my writing was that "you go to bed just as all the interesting people are getting up."

To Madame de Rothschild I owe two remarks not easily forgotten. My play was earning large sums all over the world, and I gave my daughter carte blanche at a fashionable dressmaker's. We had always been frugal people and Helen was overjoyed. "You lucky girl," the Baroness said, "never to have had all you wanted!" A farewell luncheon I gave for the Baroness went on interminably, and finally the guest of honor was forced to leave. "I have an engagement," she whispered to me. "One I *can't* break. It's with my maid's mother."

When Madame de Rothschild died, she left in her library a copy of *The Fool* I had given her after its production in London. It was the last copy I had with me, and on the flyleaf I had written, "This book belongs to *me*." To that I added, "But there is one person I had rather have own it," and the name of the Baroness. My very dear old friend, Alfred Sutro, of San Francisco, is a famous collector, and his agents abroad were instructed to buy for him anything they thought interesting. One of these agents sent him a dozen volumes acquired at an auction. The first Alfred opened was inscribed "This book belongs to me, but there is one person I had rather have own it," etc. Thus, by an amazing coincidence, the volume I had given one friend in Paris was purchased, sight unseen, by another and closer friend more than six thousand miles away.

Alfred tells this story better than I do—but then he tells *all* stories better than I do. He is a great lawyer and one of the most remarkable men I have ever known. Henri de Rothschild, when I last heard of him, was said to be in Lisbon, mentally ill and virtually penniless.

Returning to America, I found *The Sign on the Door* still current and witnessed a performance in company with Hugh Ward, who had bought it for Australia. Also, and at very long last, I rang down the curtain on my career as an author of almost anything that could be sold. Feeling that I owed him a play in place of *The Fool*, which he had declined, Al Woods had asked me to write one around a thrilling third-act situation. Al had paid \$1,500 to “an unknown English actor” for a melodrama called *The Last Trick*, and thought this situation the only part of it that could be used. *The Last Trick* wasn’t a good play, but it seemed a masterpiece in comparison with the one I constructed from its fragments. Woods liked my work, however, and so did Florence Reed, for whom it was intended. Now, however, while I wasn’t the least sure of *The Fool*, I felt very certain that anything I wrote in the future must not be turning “pin wheels to amuse a lazy-minded multitude.” I had christened the new opus *The Ladder*, and then *Broadway*, neither of these titles having been made famous yet, and when I read it to my wife, she asked, “Is *that* the sort of play you want to write?”

Without answering, I tore the manuscript in half and dropped it into the wastebasket—thereby, I think, performing a service not only to Woods and Miss Reed and the public and myself but to the “unknown English actor,” whose name was Noel Coward.

# “THEY CALLED ME IN THE PUBLIC SQUARES”

BECOMING an author is not very different from becoming a mother. There must be conception, a period of gestation, labor and labor pains, with eventual delivery, and every author must have remarked the similarity of symptoms throughout both processes. I have said that the vitality of a work may depend upon how long it was carried in the conscious or subconscious mind, and in the case of *The Fool*, that was little less than a lifetime. The play could hardly have had more ups and downs if it had spent those years in an elevator.

Between conception in the Library of Congress and delivery to its producer, I must have made eight or ten beginnings of the piece, only to lay it down again. In 1908 Elizabeth Marbury, who represented me then, had a scenario of the work when along came *The Servant in the House*, and since the genre of the two dramas is the same, I shelved mine. During the winter of 1918-1919, after my wife and I had struggled with the idea and the result had been rejected by Al Woods, I found contagious enthusiasm in Shelley Hull, who was the finest young actor of his time and simply ideal for the role of Gilchrist. Shelley wanted me to complete the manuscript in California, where he expected to spend several months, and I had reached Los Angeles when I learned of his sudden death and returned to New York.

In this period Woods was far from being the only manager to decide that I was mad. There were so many, in fact, that my friend, Samuel Hopkins Adams, amused, quoted to me the lines from Tennyson that suggested my title:

“They called me in the public squares  
The Fool that wears a crown of thorns.”

My problem was not only a producer, but an actor. Gilchrist demands qualities that are extremely rare, and the tragic passing of Shelley Hull left me in despair of finding anyone for the part. Publishers and managers are apt to think they make the only investment in an author's work, but that of the author himself may be much larger. A writer who has an earning capacity of \$50,000 a year—and many are even more fortunate—obviously has invested \$50,000 in any unremunerated task that takes a year. The loss of his investment, too, may be less serious than other consequences. Authors are quickly forgotten. One who is silent that year, and then suffers a complete failure, to be followed necessarily by another year of silence and effort, has put himself under a severe handicap. As you have discovered in these pages, my long experience with poverty had left me a crippling fear of poverty.

A very trifling incident in the early spring of 1919 finally committed me to *The Fool*. I have related the story elsewhere, but no account of me could be complete without it. One afternoon, in an old suit of clothes, with my pipe and a book borrowed from a public library, I strolled along Riverside Drive. A bench invited me, and I sat there, smoking, reading, and occasionally glancing at the Hudson, which was jeweled by the sun. It occurred to me that I was unusually happy, and I asked myself why. The answer was, "Why not?—with a comfortable old suit, a good pipe, a good book, a bench to sit upon, and spring sunshine strewing emeralds among the trees and diamonds over the river." Slowly it dawned upon me that if these things could make me happy, I was the freest and most independent of men. No one could or would take away my old suit, or my pipe, or the library book, or the park bench, or the sunshine. Only death could take away my wife, or my daughter, and not even that could destroy our love for one another. As my wife so often reminded me, we could always live in the Bronx—and no failure, I felt sure, could prevent my earning enough for *that*! These conclusions I reported exuberantly at home and added, "Come what may, sooner or later I'm going to write *The Fool*, and from then on never another word that I'm not burning to write!"

That actual writing was done during the winter of 1921-1922 in the apartment at the Belnord I had subleased from Rennold Wolf.

Most of it was accomplished at white heat. I suppose I should blush to confess that the scene of the healing of Mary Margaret was penciled through tears. That, however, has been true of those of my scenes that have moved audiences most—the farewell to Carl in *The Enemy*, and the passing of Jennifer in *The House Beautiful*. What immediately followed completion of *The Fool* gave me better reason to weep. Rejections of my work were no new experience, but almost no one refused this play without adding insult to injury. Shelley Hull, who was managed by Woods, had persuaded Al against his own judgment to make an advance of \$500 on *The Fool*. After delivery of the manuscript, Woods was never available when I called or phoned. Finally I paid back the \$500 for cancellation of his option. William A. Brady wrote me that the play contained nothing of value after its first act. William Harris, brother of my friend and manager, Henry B. Harris, wired his stage director, Robert Milton, who had induced him to carry the manuscript to the coast, "I AM NOT INTERESTED IN RELIGIOUS BUNCOMBE."

*The Fool* had been turned down by twenty-eight managers when in March Boris Kaplan called to prepare my income-tax return. I can't guess why; to find income to report that spring I required a bloodhound rather than a bookkeeper. However, Boris, an accountant for the theatrical firm of Selwyn and Company, had given an evening every year to this task. Basil King was dining with me, and I asked Boris to wait in my study. Later I found him with my manuscript in his hands. "That's a damned good play!" he exclaimed.

I think I asked him to kiss me.

No other living creature except my wife had ever said, "That's a good play." Boris added, "Why don't you read it to the Selwyns?" Barkis was willin'. I hadn't run out of enthusiasm; only out of managers. And luck turned at last. While I was still deep in the second act, Archie Selwyn developed a toothache and had to go to a dentist. Because he was ashamed of leaving me flat, I think, he said, "That sounds like first-rate stuff, and I'll take a chance on it!" Archie never heard the rest of the play; perhaps that's why he contracted for it a few days later.

Enthusiasm would have been too much to ask of him under the circumstances. First, Archie wanted a partner to share his risk,

and I induced Sam Harris to take 25 per cent of it. Then Sam and Archie proposed that we try the piece, at no cost to them, with a stock company in Los Angeles. As you know, I had adopted this method before, but now, if it resulted in loss of interest on the part of my managers, there was no hope of finding others. Both pledged themselves to stick to the ship whatever happened in Los Angeles; they merely wanted me to see Richard Bennett as Gilchrist. At that moment, as I learned later, Bennett was under engagement to the Theater Guild for the following season, but I left for the coast, reaching my destination on a Saturday in July. That night I attended a stock-company performance of *The Sign on the Door*, saw a young actress named Sara Sothern, who, I think, had never been outside of Los Angeles, and persuaded Tom Wilkes to engage her for the role of Mary Margaret.

Tom was manager of the stock company at the Majestic Theater, where under my own stage direction *The Fool* first saw the light of day—or evening—in July 1922. Dick Bennett was wholly unsuited to the part, but Sara Sothern made a great hit, and there were several other excellent performances. Our reception was somewhat mixed: Rupert Hughes, Theodore Roberts and Madame Nazimova were deeply moved by the play, most of the film colony thought it deadly, and the newspaper criticisms were venomous. On our first night, a movie magnate in the lobby asked me, "What's all this talk in your play about the Star of Bethlehem?"

I asked, "Do you know what the Star of Bethlehem is?"

"Sure," he replied, "it's a star in the Milky Way."

I told him it was the star that rose over Bethlehem when Jesus was born.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you ought to say so in the play. People don't know about that."

I agreed to do this. After all, I felt, an event of such importance shouldn't have been kept secret. Another patron in the lobby that night voiced a complaint that *did* become a line in my piece. Alluding to me, he said, "I've worked hard all my life, and now this fellow tells me what I've worked for is nothing, and that I'm nothing, and all my ideas is wrong." That state of mind, I believe, explains much of the resentment stirred up by *The Fool* and its three comparable successors. It explains why managers who had merely rejected my other plays became enraged over these, and it may

account for many of the sweepingly unfavorable newspaper criticisms. These four plays made loose-thinkers and loose-livers uncomfortable. They were intended to do just that, but you can't tell a man all his ideas "is wrong" and expect him to be delighted. Basil King once remarked to me of himself, "A certain type of person isn't angered so much by what you write as by what you *are*. A clear-thinker and clean-liver is a constant reproach to him."

Be that as it may, I returned to New York to find my managers "walking out on me." I had been encouraged by the excellent box-office receipts in Los Angeles, but the Western Union might have put up a new building with the proceeds of the wires sent to prevent the Selwyns wasting their money on *The Fool*. People who never before had evidenced the slightest interest in the Selwyns, or in the drama, or in me, telegraphed pages of denunciation. Mrs. Leslie Carter wrote, "This play is tedious and dull. I have asked how it would be received in New York, and in every case the reply was that it would never go in a million years." The movie magnate who had inquired about the Star of Bethlehem telegraphed, "The play doesn't make sense to me." When I showed Archie an enthusiastic message from Rupert Hughes, he brushed it aside with, "You can't tell a thing from the opinions of high-brows." Finally, Sam Harris had given up his 25 per cent, and Archie said, "You can't expect me to go on alone."

I thought fast and offered to buy the 25 per cent. I was late for dinner that night; Archie so feared my changing my mind that he wouldn't let me out of the office until I'd signed the agreement. As an atonement for my tardiness, and because she was the only other person who believed in the play, I gave that quarter share to my wife. My investment didn't do much to restore the faith of the Selwyns. All summer I made frequent trips to town from Shoreham, partly to find an actor for Gilchrist but chiefly to quicken the flagging interest of my managers. Al Woods had called to ask them whether they were crazy, and Archie nearly became so when he saw Sara Sothern, whom Nazimova had persuaded to come on from Los Angeles. Sara was plain, and Archie was blood-brother to the motion-picture producers who would engage show girls for any role from Florence Nightingale to Saint Teresa. "New York's full of wallflowers," Archie complained, "and you got to buy one a railway ticket from California!"



Finally, when a production had been built and stored, the warehouse promptly burned down. Our scenery wasn't insured, and the fact that I induced the Selwyns to build another production qualifies me to sell hot-water bottles in Hades. It wasn't much of a production, at that, probably costing a good deal less than the \$5,000 I had paid for my 25 per cent interest. To the end a breeze through an open stage door caused the altar in our first-act church to belly and flap noisily. The selection of a cast proved even more difficult. I tried vainly to get Basil Sydney to play Gilchrist, and Basil Rathbone, *and* Godfrey Tearle. Selwyn sent me to William Faversham, who had his butler phone me a negative answer. Poor Favy, who was in debt then, might have been saved from an Actors' Fund Home by this role. At last, when we were rehearsing with a leading man so unfit for the part that even the supporting company abandoned hope, Heaven and Edgar Selwyn sent me James Kirkwood. Jim was a success in the movies and hadn't applied for an engagement. "I was just walking past the theater," he said, "when something told me to drop in."

One insistence of Archie Selwyn's gave me a remarkable experience. Archie was determined that Jeanne Eagles should play Gilchrist's beloved, Clare Jewett. Miss Eagles had been idle some time, but I doubted her willingness to accept this rather bad part. However, Archie made an appointment for me, and authorized me to offer the actress \$600 a week. When I saw her apartment I felt sure she'd accept the offer. I have never been in a room more depressing or more eloquent of poverty. This was our first meeting, although, as you may recall, I had spoken to Miss Eagles frequently when she telephoned Rennold Wolf in Atlantic City. For both of us, therefore, the moment was embarrassing. Neither of us mentioned our mutual friend, who had been dead only a few months, and seating ourselves on a sofa, I began reading the play. Very shortly the actress interrupted by placing her hand on my knee. "You think I ruined Ren Wolf, don't you?" she asked.

"No," I answered. "I know who did."

"All right, then," Miss Eagles said; "go on reading."

At the end she declined the part and the \$600. "You can see that I need the money," she confessed, "but I've got to have faith in myself. I've got to believe that if I wait, my chance will come. I

can't afford to compromise with what could only be an opportunity to do my second best." That, I thought, was either folly or genius—depending upon the justification for such faith. In Miss Eagels' case the justification proved ample. She was one of the most brilliant actresses of her time. The same month that *The Fool* opened in New York, three blocks away Jeanne Eagels made her resounding hit in *Rain*. She couldn't have done so, of course, if she had accepted that \$600. What I have lacked and needed most, I'm afraid, is the courage and faith in myself that were this girl's.

Lowell Sherman had implored me to let him play Gilchrist, but I could imagine no one less adapted to the part and offered him instead the role of the dissipated young Jerry Goodkind. Lowell had just been involved in the "Fatty" Arbuckle scandal in Hollywood, and I could hear the laughter of a Broadway audience if and when, as Gilchrist, he spoke of the happiness of right living. He declined the other part indignantly, and then, two days before the opening in New York, changed his mind. At our dress rehearsal he knew scarcely a line, but on the first night he and Kirkwood and Sara Sothern scored the hits of the evening. Lowell was one of those rare geniuses who didn't have to learn in order to know. When in our last act he appeared, dying of locomotor ataxia, critics and physicians were convinced that he had made a long study of its symptoms. The truth was that Lowell had never thought of the matter until that dress rehearsal. A sort of dramatic sixth sense set him right. For fifteen minutes before his final appearance every night he hobbled about the wings getting "the feel of the thing." Once when his wife sent him an important message and I thoughtlessly tried to give it to him at this time, he was outraged at being brought back to himself.

We opened at Hempstead, Long Island, in a motion-picture theater the size and shape of a railway tunnel, and the evening was discouraging. Only Edgar Selwyn came to me, moist-eyed, to say he didn't see how our play could fail. Having learned in Los Angeles the reaction of a "sophisticated," hard-boiled Broadway crowd, I took a leaf from the book of David Belasco and hand-picked our first audience in New York. To the dismay of Archie Selwyn, no seats were on sale; I sent them with my compliments to men and women of culture and distinction. This, too, was a risk,

since few people enjoy what they get free, but I had to take it—and I continued to take it during my remaining years as a serious dramatist. However, I had gone through too much with *The Fool* to appraise results on that first night. Standing at the back of the Times Square Theater the evening of October 23, 1922, I kept muttering, "I don't know whether they like it." Finally, during the second act, I added, "And what's more, I don't care a damn!" and went home to bed.

The newspaper criticisms of next day were not only unfavorable; they were virulent. I should hardly have been treated with greater contumely if I had murdered my mother. Our second-night receipts were less than \$500—about my average for second nights when the critics had said their say as to my four "preachy" plays. The next morning one of the managers who had declined *The Fool* tried to lease the theater for the following Monday, and another offered to bet Archie the piece wouldn't last three weeks. Wednesday evening I stumbled into Archie's office as he was selling out to a cut-rate agency. That would have finished us, of course, and as part owner I prevented the sale. On the way out I stopped at the box office and learned that our intake had dropped to just over \$300. At home I said to my wife, "Archie had a chance to get from under without loss, and I had to spoil it for him." She answered, "At this moment, I wouldn't sell *my* interest for \$50,000!" Perhaps you begin to understand why, after nearly forty years, I still think I have the best wife in the world!

Thursday or Friday one of Archie's secretaries asked me what I wanted to do with three baskets of mail she said had come for me. As a beginning, I opened it. Scores of the most distinguished citizens of our town had written me in fervent praise of the play. There were letters from university presidents, professors, authors, artists, scientists, merchants and lawyers—hundreds of them. If so large a cross section of the population was enthusiastic, I thought, sooner or later our tide *must* turn. With money gambled by an advertising agency, I bought the quarter-page of newspaper space for which I wrote the screaming headline, "ARE ALL THESE WISE MEN FOOLS?" Followed quotations from letters received from Nicholas Murray Butler, Charles Dana Gibson, David Belasco and

eight or ten more of our most prominent citizens. Then I peeled off my coat and prepared to fight for my life—or for my first important play, and my chance to go on writing important plays, which was the same thing. This fight I waged during all my remaining nine years in the theater. I have been blamed for it, but if a man will not fight for what he believes in I have no use for him. The trade I had acquired with Ziegfeld and Brady and the Shuberts, the lessons I had learned with *Way Down East* now stood me in good stead, and once more I repeat, all is grist that comes to a wise man's mill.

My conclusion was—and still is—that there was—and is—a vast public for the kind of plays I wanted to write—if it *could, and can, be reached*. That public is not walking Broadway, waiting to get into a "show" before the police can close the doors. It does not read criticisms and does not like what most critics like. Part of it lives on the upper West Side, or in Harlem or the Bronx, but most of it owns its own home in Brooklyn or East Orange, tries to pay off the mortgage and send Junior through college, and spends its evenings with good books and the best magazines. To this public I addressed myself. We began with Affie McVicker, who had called my attention to the baskets of mail, and with a typewriter on a kitchen table in an unrented cubbyhole in the Selwyn Theater Building. That cubbyhole I kept till the end, though before the season was over I had seven stenographers and offices and secretaries in New York, Boston and Chicago. In that year we wrote 20,000 letters, and I made nearly 300 speeches in a hundred different cities.

The hoped-for turn in the tide did not await these efforts, though it confirmed my view of the reason for them. On our third Monday in New York, box-office receipts suddenly jumped almost \$1,000. None of us could understand it; then I discovered from the newspapers that the day before, dozens of clergymen had preached sermons about *The Fool*. We broke even that third week with receipts just under \$14,000. From the fourth week, we were packing our theater, and after Christmas we began giving matinees every day—twelve performances a week to gross receipts in excess of \$50,000 for the first fortnight. Anxious to cash in as quickly as possible, Archie Selwyn had sold motion-picture rights in the play for release at the end of 1923, and that meant that we must cover

the country as quickly as possible. Before the end of that season, seven companies were touring in *The Fool*—nearly 300 actors, reaching audiences of not less than 85,000 people each week, or close to five million theatergoers in a single season. I have never known exactly what profit *The Fool* earned, but it was in the neighborhood of a million dollars. Our weekly payroll was around \$40,000.

Our first road company opened in Boston in February 1923. Months before, a lovely, talented and successful actress, Alexandra Carlisle, came to me with a story of a long-continued misfortune and begged me to employ her as a stenographer. Alex, who had starred here and in England, was temporarily engaged as a waitress. She was an extremely intelligent woman who had made the speech seconding Coolidge's nomination for the Presidency. She was far too beautiful to be the secretary of any man who didn't want to be talked about, and I agreed to pay her \$100 a week in advance of salary to be earned in the role of Clare Jewett if and when we organized a second company. She was the best of our Clares, and scored heavily in Boston and Chicago. *The Fool* had long runs in both places, and in Boston I was given the freedom of the city, and Channing Cox, Governor of Massachusetts, turned the first spadeful of earth for a tree planted in my honor in Poets' Row in the Common. My friend, George Farnum, formerly Assistant Attorney General of the United States, assures me I cannot be arrested in Boston for any crime except murder, but as murder is the only crime I have ever wanted to commit, that doesn't help much.

Being arrested in Boston, where police censorship has suppressed many fine works of art and literature, would seem a likely experience for almost anyone. Going there with *The Fool*, and returning to my old headquarters, the Touraine Hotel, I found myself faced with a placard announcing that I could be jailed for registering under any name not my own. That night Alex Carlisle asked me if she must make up in front of a printed notice that she might be imprisoned for indecent exposure or for any obscene or lascivious movement or action. At the risk of heaven knows what penalty, I tore the notice off the walls of all our dressing rooms. A few weeks later I had been speaking on Beacon Hill, and walking home in a blizzard, found myself hopelessly lost on Boston Common.

Worse, a bridge above me confirmed my suspicion that I was giving a creditable imitation of Eliza crossing the ice. There was a sign at the top of the embankment, and certain that it must point the way to Tremont or Boylston Street, I ignited a letter in order to see the inscription. It read "No Flirting." If ever there was a moment in which I felt no impulse to flirt, that was it, but Boston feels its responsibility for your morals under any and all conditions.

Just before the conclusion of our spring and summer in the Hub, by sheer accident I introduced Miss Carlisle to a chance acquaintance who lived in Chicago. The following season, as we were nearing the end of several months in that city, Alex decided to leave us and the stage to marry this gentleman. At her request I gave the bride away. Many years afterward I spent a pleasant evening in their home, and less than a fortnight later this wealthy and very charming fellow killed himself. Alex survived him briefly. She was a delightful companion and an excellent player. There were many such among the three hundred who appeared in *The Fool*. It seems to me noteworthy that during my forty years as a dramatist and producer I found only one actor of whose conduct a reasonable man could have complained—my only unpleasant experience with any member of that profession. One of my cherished possessions is a parchment scroll recording these mutually agreeable relations, and signed by 280 men and women who were concluding their engagements in *The Fool*.

Charles Cochran had contracted for the English rights in this play but was in financial difficulties, and the London production was made by my old friend and manager, Frank Curzon. Frank, too, had fallen on hard times, but had been saved when one of his horses won the Derby and about £100,000. Curzon was ill then, and since he found himself unable to follow custom and go to the King's box for congratulations, the King came to him. When Frank and I lunched together during rehearsals of *The Fool*, his secretary, Gertrude Butler, begged me to let him have only crackers with milk. Like Reggie De Koven, Frank compromised on duck with champagne. A few years later his general manager, Tommy Vaughn, put a problem to me: "Frank has a horse entered in the third race today, but Frank won't live until the race is over. Do

you think we should have the horse scratched?" I answered, "Curzon wouldn't like that." Frank died while the horse was winning. That night, when I dined at Simpson's, my waiter said, "You must be upset about Mr. Curzon. He was a fine gentleman and a gallant sportsman." To which I should say, "Stet."

In the course of our long and close association Frank and I disagreed only twice—very minor disagreements and both about *The Fool*. Still certain that the play was not for "sophisticates," I wanted to present it in a large theater at popular prices. Frank insisted upon the small and swanky Apollo, where, after about 200 nights, our 30-shilling stalls were vacant while queues two blocks long waited to get into the pit, which contained only forty seats. Our second dispute concerned Sara Sothern. Sara had given me a good deal of trouble in New York, where her father had made me responsible for her, but she had been conspicuously successful everywhere. I wanted her in the English cast, but Sara refused to go. Finally she changed her mind, and sailed with my wife and daughter and me on the *Aquitania*. She shared our London apartment in Park Lane, and when Frank saw her rehearse, he complained almost as Archie Selwyn had done when I brought the girl to New York. Sara more than duplicated her success. Police reserves rescued her from an admiring first-night crowd that clamored for bits of her frock and locks of her hair as souvenirs, and later the Princess Royal went to her dressing room to present her with a diamond brooch the size of a belt buckle. Sara returned to New York determined to play the leading role in my next work, *The Enemy*, and when I said "No," went back to England and wrote me abusive letters. Shortly afterward she left the stage, married a young Englishman, and is now, I believe, a contented housewife and the mother of half a dozen children.

The tragedy of our experience with *The Fool* in London was that amazingly brilliant but unreliable actor, Henry Ainley. Harry's opening performance of Gilchrist was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. He had been a popular idol, had lost favor because of his behavior, and now a loyal London audience rose to him in noisy enthusiasm. I doubt that there was ever a greater ovation. However, Harry's self-indulgence had mastered him. Week-ending in his home at Seven Oaks, in Kent, I had found him

constantly tense, the cause of great anxiety to his wife, Elaine, a delightful woman who remains my fast friend. Shortly after the beginning of our run Harry's eccentricities began manifesting themselves. At Curzon's request, I called a rehearsal at which I talked to Ainley as I think no other star has ever been addressed in the presence of his supporting company. Harry left the rehearsal and returned with his arms full of gifts for me. When I sailed for America, we engaged an actor friend of Harry's, who was supposed to have great influence over him, to sit in the first row every night as a constant admonition. This last resort was ineffective, and there is no doubt that this superb actor proved to be our heaviest liability.

It would be difficult to estimate the reach and influence of *The Fool*. In one form or another it became known to about a hundred million people, and it is still acted widely, and still required reading in a great many schools and colleges. The critics, I believe, continue to regard it with contempt. The year of its production in New York the Pulitzer Prize for the play most widely and beneficially influencing public thought and ideals was awarded a melodrama called *Icebound*—as, the season of *The Enemy*, it was awarded *Craig's Wife*. *The Fool* earned large sums for me, most of which went in income taxes and the panic of 1929, but my lasting reward was a treasure trove of hundreds of letters from people who wrote that they had been helped by the play. Because of it one man established a fund for sending young fellows to college. Another declared he had revolutionized his business methods and given a share of the concern to his employees. Dozens credited the play with healing old quarrels, ending divorce actions, and, in one case, preventing a suicide. To many of my newspaper friends, all this was funny, and I had become a combination of preacher, teacher and Lydia Pinkham. Twenty years later, I am still unable to see the joke. This experience confirmed my faith in my father's conviction that an author has a heavy responsibility for his fellow men. It was a sort of rebirth; as President Oxnam said in presenting me at DePauw University, "Pollock created *The Fool*, but it is equally true that *The Fool* created Pollock."



## I SEE MY FINISH

THERE was no need of asking myself what was to follow *The Fool*. Throughout twenty-two years of writing movies and musical comedies and vaudeville sketches and a few creditable but unimportant plays, I had stored material for a lifetime of serious effort. In Washington, while Dewey was still a popular idol, I had noted, “‘Oh wad some power the giftie gie us to see oursels as others see us.’ See *Gulliver’s Travels*. One-act play to be called ‘The Enemy,’ in which we hear *their* opinion of *us*, and find it exactly like *our* opinion of *them*.” This was to be the genesis of my next work.

In 1920, en route to Egypt, my wife and daughter and I met our dear friend, Peter Klotz, who became Archabbott of the Monastery of St. Peter at Salzburg. Dr. Klotz, a distinguished anthropologist, was on his way back from Australia and America with help for starving Vienna. The victims of war, he said, were women and children, and then he pictured conditions in Austria so vividly that I determined to see them for myself. In Vienna that spring I witnessed a great many of the incidents dramatized in *The Enemy*, and heard firsthand reports of the rest—of bread that “contained everything but flour” and produced unsightly diseases, and babies still dying of malnutrition. I saw the results of currency inflation, and my boyhood friend Dr. Leopold Arndt recalled the years I had known him to deprive himself of necessities so that he might pay premiums on an endowment policy with the proceeds of which, a few weeks before, he had been able to purchase only five eggs. I stepped out of taxis and paid their drivers 7,000 times the sums shown on the meters; I gave a beggar 20,000 crowns, which would have been \$4,000 not long before, and heard him ask, “What can I

do with that? It won't buy a cigarette." So, after production of *The Fool* I went back to Austria, and, in the monastery at Salzburg began writing *The Enemy*.

The peace many of us seek vainly all our lives I found at St. Peter's, where I rose before daylight for prayers and dined in a silence broken only by the intoning of Latin. Between rising and dining I saw no one but the unobtrusive lay brother who waited on me. There were no distractions of any kind; no mail or telephone messages or radio or newspapers. When I returned home and scanned the accumulated journals of several months, I learned how little that happens outside ourselves really touches us. Evenings, in the great hall where Klotz had introduced shuffleboard as a diversion, I taught the brothers mah-jongg. Money had no value; my only expenditure was the equivalent of thirty cents the Archabbott permitted me to give a coachman, after scolding me roundly for attempting a small present to my lay brother, who was pledged to poverty. The wine from the monastery's vineyards was excellent, and trying to explain our Eighteenth Amendment, I found no one who believed me. Brother Joseph, who wished to give me a case of Karlowitzer to take to America, plainly thought me inventing an excuse. Finally I accepted half a dozen bottles that never got beyond the Savoy Hotel in London. A rough Channel crossing must have affected the contents. I laid the bottles on the shelf of a closet which, fifteen minutes before a dinner party, I opened—to find my shoes floating in wine and my evening clothes so saturated that my neighbors at the table got drunk by merely sniffing me!

Back in New York I discovered the time to be unpropitious. We had had enough of the war, and of course there was never going to be another one. In the subsequent words of Westbrook Pegler, we had "made our decision as to the League of Nations, and then got plastered on bathtub gin, and went lurching into the era of wonderful nonsense, with a hey-nonny-nonny, and a hot cha-cha." Worse still for me, in my absence Maxwell Anderson had produced his matchless *What Price Glory*, a war play to end all war plays. Once more I began the laborious and humiliating process of trying to dispose of a drama no one wanted. At last, early in 1925, the manuscript was accepted by two managers on the same day—Messmore Kendall and Crosby Gaige. Crosby said, "I don't believe the

piece will earn a penny, but I'd like to produce it anyway." Gaige had been one of the firm of Selwyn and Company, which presented *The Fool*, and its successor eventually went to him.

I have never ceased being puzzled that in every field, with thousands or hundreds of thousands of unemployed, it is almost impossible to find the man or woman one wants for a job. Digging up a Gilchrist for *The Fool* proved child's play in comparison with unearthing a Pauli for *The Enemy*. Planning a preliminary week out of town in the spring of 1925, we rehearsed one Pauli after another, and were about to postpone the opening when William Harris suggested Fay Bainter. At two o'clock in a morning in May Miss Bainter consented to assume the role, and at ten that same morning, reporting for rehearsal, she had memorized every word she was to speak in the first act. As Pauli is an unusually long part, this was an amazing feat.

Our initial performance at New Haven on June 1 was electric. Fay's work in the climax of our third act brought William Lyon Phelps to me declaring that it was the most deeply moving ten minutes he had ever experienced in a theater. Pierre de Rohan, afterward a critic in New York, wrote in the *New Haven Register*: "I cried like a baby, and only with the greatest effort refrained from standing up and shouting 'Stop! Torture me no more!' *The Enemy* preaches a sermon more vital, more moving, more potent than anything the theater has ever known." When I read "preaches a sermon," however, I knew what I had coming to me. At our final rehearsal in New York the following October I called the company on the stage, and predicted, "Boys and girls, tomorrow you're going to read that this is among the worst plays ever written, but don't worry! We'll win anyway." This announcement I repeated at the dress rehearsal of every subsequent play of mine, and always my prophecy was fulfilled. My four most ambitious works, *The Fool*, *The Enemy*, *Mr. Moneybags* and *The House Beautiful*, won a total of three favorable criticisms.

*The Enemy* enjoyed a long and profitable season in the home of *The Fool*—the Times Square Theater in New York. This in spite of a number of handicaps. Between June and October, the electricity had leaked out of Miss Bainter's Pauli. Fay is *too* skillful; her nervousness after insufficient rehearsal resulted in a *tour de*

force in New Haven; at ease, five months later, she had substituted technical perfection. Hers was a moving performance, nevertheless, as were those of Russ Whytal, Olive May, Harold Vermilye, John Wray and Charles Dalton, whom you may recall in connection with my unhappy efforts with *The Nazarene*. I have told you how we lost Miriam Hopkins between New Haven and New York. In April 1926 Fay decided Pauli's third act was too great a strain and retired from the cast—only to offer that third act twice a day for months afterward in vaudeville! "The play's the thing," but a management can't advertise a star for months, and then take her out of the performance without diminishing patronage. Florence Rittenhouse, who succeeded Fay, was excellent, but business suffered. Curiously, our worst handicap, perhaps, may have been that the piece *was* so deeply moving. Pierre de Rohan was not the only auditor who wanted to cry, "Torture me no more!" When *The Enemy* left the Times Square, the attendant in the ladies' room told me she'd never before been so sorry to see a play depart. Flattered, I asked why. "Well," said the dusky matron, "the money I been making out of powder-rags is nobody's business."

Presented in London later by André Charlot, *The Enemy* ran very briefly. Billy Phelps, who witnessed it there, also, blamed the production. "It was acted," he said, "as though war were a tea party." English managers and directors always have been apologetic for melodrama, and I think my greatest service to Frank Curzon was putting pace and virility into *The Fool* and *The Sign on the Door*. At rehearsals of the former work the fine actor who played the coal miner, Umanski, was always reminding me tactfully that "we're in the West End." I told him an angry coal miner wasn't likely to be much affected by that. As I wrote in the preface to *The Enemy*, "All life is melodrama, certainly that part of life which we call war." The best effect in this play was the tread of marching soldiers that never ceased during the third act, and that put audiences on edge and ready to understand Pauli's outcry to the passing troops: "Not *my* baby. *He* won't answer your trumpets!" In London, I am told, this tread came from a phonograph behind a door in a dressing room! *The Enemy* continued to be popular in America until World War No. 2, when it succumbed to the reputation of being "a pacifist play." Every sane man is a

pacifist, of course, but I don't see what pacifism has to do with being attacked by gangsters—which is our present situation.

I was kept from directing the English *Enemy* by the production in New York of my third, and, I think, my best serious effort, *Mr. Moneybags*. This was easily my most original and ambitious work—as it was my most expensive failure. With the financial backing of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Film Company, I produced the play myself and became my own manager. This urge had plagued me for some time, as it has plagued and been the undoing of so many dramatists. In Buffalo in 1912 I had been offered and had wanted to buy a quarter interest in another man's play, but my wife refused to release me from my pledge not to invest money in the theater. That play was *Within the Law*, and it would have made me a rich man. My wife's 25 per cent of *The Fool* earned a fortune for her, and I fared well with a smaller share of *The Enemy*. I began asking myself why an author shouldn't stand or fall alone with his work, and of course I had a better reason than most, since my plays owed so much to the labor I did for them after production. I had had experience in every branch of the theater, and still have profound beliefs as to reforms needed in the *business* of theatrical management.

One of these is and always has been a conviction that the price of theater tickets is too high. I have already touched upon that in this book, and am prepared to argue it at length. In 1925 I projected my so-called Dollar Theater, to which there is still frequent allusion in the newspapers. This I wanted to make a labor of love. My proposal to hoped-for financial backers was that if they would provide the essential capital, I would give my services gratis for five years. For various reasons we required nearly a million dollars, and the utmost I could obtain was a pledge of \$1,000 a week from Otto Kahn. As Anita Loos observed, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," and there is no difficulty raising money for "girl-shows."

My plan, involving overhead expenses reduced by building a small theater with a large seating capacity—which is quite possible—on comparatively cheap ground remote from Broadway, was fundamentally sound. It included schools of every branch of dramatic art, a resident company most of which was to be engaged by the

year, visiting stars, and a new play every month. There were to be other innovations, of course, and unblushingly I agree with that sage and sympathetic commentator on our theater, Ward Morehouse, who wrote recently that "Pollock's plan might have given a new lease of life to spoken drama in America."

Failing a Dollar Theater, I decided that my first act as a manager would be to cut prices. Unwisely, I chose a production that cost over \$100,000, and operated at a weekly expense in excess of \$14,000. Even then we might have "got away with it" if we had enjoyed a capacity success. *Mr. Moneypenny* committed the unpardonable sin of asking from audiences more than they could give. It was in a vein of satire, understanding of which has been denied Anglo-Saxons, and being a completely new form, it demanded the liveliest quality of imagination. At the period of a drunken orgy of speculation and spending, I hoped to repeat the Biblical admonition that love of money may be the root of all evil. There was no point, I concluded, in showing a family ruined by materialism; I wanted to show a *world* ruined, and it is difficult to squeeze a world into the thirty or forty feet of a stage. After much thought I hit upon the idea we described as "cartoon comedy." *Mr. Moneypenny* was actually a *verbal cartoon*. It had no more relation to reality than—let us say—Oppen's pictures of "The Trusts" as a fat man with dollar marks on his clothing. However, everyone who saw those dollar marks knew what Oppen meant. When I showed *Mr. Moneypenny* as an "oily, oozy, persuasive, untrustworthy" person who lived in the safe-deposit vaults of a bank, or the prosperous Jones staggering on a treadmill while scores of voices cried "Gimme!" and "More!" I thought people would know what *I* meant. Most of 'em didn't.

We suffered two other misfortunes: First, the play was written for Lowell Sherman, and no other actor could bring what he could have brought to the title role. If you recall Lowell Sherman, and will read my description of the character—one of the best pieces of writing I've ever done—I think you'll agree with me. Hale Hamilton, who had been in my dramatization of *The Pit* and was a brother of the chairman of the National Republican Committee, was adequate as *Mr. Moneypenny*, but that wasn't good enough. I should add that Donald Meek was entirely perfect as Jones. Sec-

ond, I tried to preach the dangers of too much money at the very time when people believed there "wasn't no such animal." A drunken man, I suppose, can see nothing extraordinary in drunkenness, and a very large portion of our population was equally impervious to exhibitions of materialism and riotous vulgarity.

To me our so-called "café society" and night clubs were and are symptomatic. In *Mr. Moneypenny* I hoped to distill the sordid animalism of many of these resorts into a ten-minute scene that would leave audiences horrified. Jimmie Forbes picked a notorious example, and we spent an evening there. Through its proprietor I engaged eight girls even he had rejected—hard-faced and hand-painted sirens, with cigarette-and-whisky voices.\* I secured an exceptionally raucous jazz band, and wrote dialogue for people at the tables that reached a new low in vacuity and viciousness. The whole picture was too dreadful to be seen, so I plunged it in darkness, in which nothing was visible but burning cigarette ends, and out of which came the pandemonium of whisky voices, raucous jazz and foul chatter. Finally, for the whisky voices, I prepared the most utterly trite and maudlin ballad I could contrive, and persuaded a composer to supply the same kind of music. I never witnessed this scene without disgust—and I never saw an audience that didn't regard it as a gay and joyful reminder of the best possible way to spend an evening. When, to my amazement, our maudlin ballad was published, it became popular, and earned for me almost the only revenue I ever got out of this enterprise.

The labor involved was beyond belief. Responsible for all the details of production and operation, both as art and business, few of my days were less than eighteen hours long. Mornings and afternoons I spent in the theater; nights in my office in the Times Building, where, until the small hours ceased being small, I dictated letters, went over estimates and bills, and consulted my business, secretarial, and technical staffs—the latter including Robert Edmond Jones, who designed our scenery, and Richard Boleslavski, who directed. Of course not even my practically indestructible constitution could stand the strain. By the time we got to Mecca Temple

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\*One of these girls was beautiful, but so dumb that we had to abandon hope of directing her. Strolling along Broadway soon afterward, I was astonished at seeing her name in big letters on a billboard. Our siren had become a popular movie star. We paid her \$50 a week; her Hollywood salary, I believe, was \$2,500.

for our final week of dress rehearsals I had to be lifted into and from my chair. The last of these rehearsals began at eight o'clock on a Friday evening and continued without interruption until two o'clock Sunday morning. *Then* an electrician fell from the top of one of our steel towers, landing before us with a broken neck, and the company was dismissed. I went to the Times Building, where I continued work until Sunday afternoon, when we embarked for Philadelphia. My financial return for the ten months of writing *Moneypenny*, the two months of producing it, and the three of its run, was exactly \$53. This came from publication of the play. Royalty from box-office receipts would have been several thousand dollars, but as my backers had lost a fortune I refused to accept payment.

*Mr. Moneypenny* was first presented at the Liberty Theater on October 17, 1928. The same evening Gilbert Miller revealed a trifling little comedy at the Empire, and most of the critics went to that. At least one of the principal reviewers never got around to *Moneypenny*. So far as I know, none of them mentioned or took into account our daring and purely altruistic effort to lower prices. Here was a play written by an established dramatist, produced at a cost of more than \$100,000, with scenery by Robert Edmond Jones, two orchestras, and a company of 112, including a dozen big names, and with the best seats at two dollars. The whole venture was dismissed casually in the shortest possible newspaper space, and excepting for one or two reviews, without a word of encouragement or commendation for anybody. On the morning of October 18, 1928, I decided to quit the theater, and though fulfillment of that promise to myself was delayed three years, eventually I made good.

History repeating itself, after the reviews had appeared our second night almost justified the published witticism that "the audience arrived in a taxicab." Ten nights later we had only 96 vacant seats. Even that was too many. As stated, our costs and prices in conjunction required continuously capacity audiences. In my diary, the day after our opening I had written, "The usual fight ahead." It was a fight that couldn't be won, but that was always so near victory that both Metro-Goldwyn and I kept up the struggle until they had lost a lot of money, and I had lost my health. *Mr.*



*Moneypenny* ran twelve weeks, each of them financially good enough to have supported any other dramatic production in town, and when we abandoned it, was taken over hopefully but briefly by another theatrical firm. No other work of mine was so warmly praised by the discriminating. It had been scheduled for presentation in Moscow when my published comments on Communism terminated negotiations.

One of my rewards for this effort was the friendship of Boleslavski—a very remarkable man. Boley had been a director of the Moscow Art Theater, had fought desperately in and after the First World War, and later wrote the best-seller called *The Way of the Lancer*. He was a giant in size and strength, but gentle and simple as a child, and I have never known anyone else so completely without material wants. We paid him \$500 a week, and he slept on a canvas cot in a room in an abandoned brewery that contained nothing else except books and a kitchen chair and table. When we were in Philadelphia the company wished to give him a present and delegated me to discover what he would like. Boley had a beautiful fitted bag; we had decided to purchase its mate for him when he remarked one day that the suit case was the damnedest nuisance he had ever encountered. Lunching with him at John Wanamaker's, I hit on a method of obtaining the information desired. We had been guessing how much capital was invested in Wanamaker's, and I asked, "If you might have any article you chose from this store, what would you take?"

Boley looked at me in wide-eyed wonder.

"Nuddings," he replied, in absolute honesty. "Vy should I complicate myself vid a lot of foolishness I don't vant?"

Nevertheless, for some reason beyond my comprehension, Boley died in Hollywood—where death, for an artist, is merely an encore.

The end of *Mr. Moneypenny* left me feeling like Othello with his occupation gone. For a few weeks I more or less idled, reading much and playing checkers with my mother every afternoon, and then from sheer boredom I began writing the trifling comedy that ironically was to be my last job in the theater. It was a sick man's work, without vitality or enthusiasm, and though it boasted a good idea and one or two good scenes, I never had any illusions as to its value. Jessie Bonstelle, who liked the piece, produced it February

1, 1932, at the Detroit Civic Theater, but in her favorable opinion remained a minority of one. The play, *Stranglehold*, was a post-script to my career as a dramatist. The writing wasn't completed that spring of 1929; I doubt that it was ever *really* completed. I was suffering agonies of neuritis, and one morning in the middle of the third act discovered that I couldn't remember the names of my own characters.

I wanted to go somewhere, but there was nowhere I wanted to go. For twenty years, Paris had been my only playground, and winter was no season for Paris. I had been there in February 1923, after a breakdown that followed *The Fool*, and had found only one place in town where I could be warm—the shop called Galeries Lafayette. By purchasing hairpins and other inexpensive articles I contrived to stay there hours at a time, and finally took refuge in Spain. Now, in February 1929, I decided we should visit Havana, and after a few weeks sail from there for France. This proved to be impracticable. The vessel selected was the dirtiest I have ever seen; we went up one side, came down the other, wired for our accustomed rooms in the *Aquitania*, and, aboard her, sailed from New York the night of our return from Cuba. Back at Shoreham, though not wholly restored, I pottered with *Stranglehold*, though to my own astonishment I found myself thinking more and more of the story that became *The House Beautiful*.

During the autumn of 1929 the stock market crashed, and within a few weeks I had lost half my savings. Every penny of them had been in government bonds, and then, caught in the contagion of that remarkable epidemic, I bought gilt-edged stock at prices that now seem fantastic. Shares in a great railway system that my bankers and attorneys told me were "a gift" at \$200 proved to be just that, but not to me. I sold them later at \$14—and they have never since had much more value. Our Mississippi bubble had burst with a bang, bringing a first touch of sanity that wasn't to spread far until the Second World War. The previous orgy had to be seen to be believed. Almost no class escaped. When the crash came, tonsorial parlors were full of ruined barbers and manicure girls, and the janitor of our flat had to sell his \$5,600 limousine.

Somehow this didn't seem a good moment for abandoning a

profession to the acquiring and practice of which I had devoted most of my forty-nine years. Moreover, the theme of the play I had in mind kept nagging me. Its germ was an experience I have related so often that I must not do so again—the story of the shiny blue serge that, in my imagination, became shining armor, and left me asking what was the real difference between this linen salesman and Sir Lancelot. Lancelot fought in the lists thirty minutes for the woman he loved; my linen salesman had fought forty years and would die fighting. I sought and found a way to dramatize this idea; to show on the stage that Archie Davis and Lancelot were substantially the same person. On May 19, 1930, I wrote in my diary, “Began work on *The House Beautiful*—my last play so help me God!”

The published result is dedicated “To my Daughter, and the Pine Trees,” as it should have been. With Archie Davis and his wife, Jennifer, as my hero and heroine, this piece proved to be a history of our own home at Shoreham, and of the dreams and aspirations that went into it. Trees I had planted with a garden trowel, and that had grown to be forty feet high, swayed outside my windows as I typed directions for the growth of the trees in *The House Beautiful*. Our own cottage had taken shape in our minds and become a reality almost as miraculously as Jen’s and Archie’s does in the first five minutes of the play. “We’ll buy the pine trees,” Jen and Archie say, “and sit on the front porch and watch ’em grow.”

“How long does it take a pine tree?”

“Twenty years, maybe. And, if you’re happy, that’s twenty minutes. . . . This is going to be a beautiful house. I can see it now—going up while we dream of it. . . . I think life’s beautiful and grand and romantic—all around the people who think it’s ugly and sordid and prosy. What’s prosy about doing your job, and loving your husband, and sitting with his hand in yours through the long twilight evenings?”

“In our own home.”

“All finished and everything.”

It is finished when the lights go up, to disclose the newlyweds actually holding hands before their own fireplace. What follows is the saga of Archie and Jennifer, and of all the brave, honest,



"TO THE AUTHOR OF MY BEING"

A photograph given my mother when I was 45.



PARSIFAL,  
the rabbit, understandably contented in the arms of my daughter Helen.

little men who march to work every morning and come home at night to the castle where women they love keep the flag flying. Very much of myself, and of my life and faith went into *The House Beautiful*, and even now I must apologize for finding myself unable to recall the play without tenderness.

It was completed during the early autumn of 1930, and most of that winter was devoted to finding a producer. By then managers had forgotten the glamorous profits of *The Fool* and *The Enemy* and remembered only that I was that most contemptible thing in the theater, a preacher and teacher, and far from being a Darling of the Gods. Many took their appraisals of me from the newspapers and saw no reason for risking their money on material that was almost sure to be condemned. While my old friend and agent, Alice Kauser, was hawking the manuscript, my equally old friend and manager, Crosby Gaige, decided to take a chance with it, and we began work immediately.

Work is the word. Chiefly, I had fallen into the bad habit of letting imagination run riot and disregarding the practical limitations of the stage. *Mr. Moneybags* should have taught me a lesson, and didn't. It was charming to fancy Archie and Jennifer dreaming about a home that, while they talked of it, became a reality. Actually, the difficulties were almost insurmountable. Another old friend, Joseph Urban, an architect as well as a scene designer and painter, who had been associated with me in two *Ziegfeld Folies*, struggled with the problem and gave it up. Finally it was solved, with some compromises, by Jo Mielziner—but that was only the beginning of our troubles. It may not mean much to you that there were 360 cues for musicians and stage hands—an average of one every twenty seconds—but it meant a great deal to us. Again, we spent days and nights without interruption in the theater, not knowing whether it was day or night, Friday or Saturday or Sunday. I still recall the pathetically weak voice of that admirable actress, Mary Philips, pleading, "I don't remember when we last ate, but couldn't I—please—have a sandwich?"

We were rewarded the evening of March 12, 1931, when an audience in the Apollo Theater, New York, watched the Davis home materialize from thin air, and burst into such applause as one hears only once or twice in a lifetime. As theretofore, the applause

was confined to our audiences. I had made my customary prediction at the dress rehearsal—"Tomorrow you're going to read that this is among the worst plays ever written"—and, as theretofore, it came to pass. In the *New York Times*, J. Brooks Atkinson spoke of the author's "remarkable instinct for getting to the heart of human situations and awakening the sympathy of his audience. In his new play he has also mastered a free, episodic style of play-writing that can touch on the essential scenes of an average lifetime without wasting time or blurring the story." This, I believe, was our only favorable review. Once more I could have noted in my diary, "The usual fight ahead."

Once more we won, but the struggle was harder than ever before. Our first matinee tested the capacity of the theater. However, nothing can be more annoying than hitting a man on the head with a sledge hammer repeatedly and having him refuse to stay dead. My four most ambitious plays had been subjected to this treatment, and three of them survived. This must have been humiliating to the sledge wielders, and now they didn't propose to have their verdict reversed. Two successive publicity agents resigned because they couldn't get a word printed about the play. One drama editor even dropped its name from his daily list of available entertainments. There were many such handicaps, and others not related to journalism. Crosby's fortunes had suffered severely in the financial panic of 1929, and protection of his stock investments required far more money than we were earning. Frequently, when I had dictated hundreds of letters, they lay in the office a week for lack of postage. When, encouraged by success in New York, we sent another company on tour, there were no longer theaters to play in. The movies had done that, of course. An excellent cast, headed by the talented Ethel Intropidi, wandered about the country, appearing in high schools, convention halls, and, once, in a mortuary parlor. In a real theater in Kansas City, when I apologized for stumbling into her room while she was changing a frock, Ethel reassured me, "I stopped being embarrassed after the third week of dressing behind two trunks in a corridor!"

In spite of all this, *The House Beautiful* turned in a good profit in a bad season, but I had no intention of trying it again. The game had ceased being worth the candle—even if the cards *weren't*

stacked. There was nothing dishonest in this situation. On the contrary most of the critics in New York, and many elsewhere, very honestly disapproved of me, and my plays, and all they and I stood for. The few who felt otherwise were naturally timid about saying so. When anyone or anything is regarded with contempt by masterminds, it takes a brave and self-confident spirit to dissent. I had won three battles out of four, but I became weary of fighting. As Emerson says, "We descend to meet." Conditions in the theater itself were progressively worse. The quaintly unlettered and unethical manager of other days, who still had an instinct for and love of his calling, together with capital to back his judgment, was giving way to the tyro who, if he liked a play, was without funds to produce it unless he could interest Hollywood or some wallpaper manufacturer. For years my wife had been remarking of my passion for the theater that I "fell in love with a charming girl and remained so after she became a bedizened jade."

Be that as it may, I left the playhouse chiefly for the same reason that Elmer Rice left it after writing *Street Scene*, and that many other first-rate dramatists have left it, but unlike Elmer, I shall not return. As I told Arthur Hopkins recently when that gifted impresario asked why I abandoned a profession to which I had devoted most of my life, "I got tired sitting up all night to find whether Richard Watts liked me."



## BORN WITH A TRADE

THE German comic weekly *Fliegende Blätter* once printed a cartoon of a tramp looking at a gaudily dressed girl and exclaiming, "Lucky sex; born with a trade!" Nobody was ever born with a trade, but one may be born with an aptitude and a determination to learn, as people are born with a *tendency* to tuberculosis.

I was always talkative, but I had never spoken in public until, at the age of thirty, someone persuaded me to deliver a postprandial address for the old Sunrise Club. The result was painful. Walking home afterward, with Jim Corbett, former champion heavyweight of the world, I assured him that nothing could ever induce me to try it again. Jim said, "The worst mistake a man can make is to confess to himself that he can be licked. I was knocked down twelve times in my first fight, and that's why I kept on fighting. You've got to keep on *talking* until you know you're good."

I took Jim's advice, and for years never refused an invitation. Each address was an agony to me, but obviously and progressively less an agony to my audience. I acquired self-confidence, learned to think on my feet, and at last, to my amazement, discovered that I could actually make people laugh and applaud. As I have declared once or twice in this book, all is grist that comes to a man's mill. When *The Fool* was produced, I found nothing more useful than my ability to talk. I occupied pulpits, spoke in schools and for clubs, and thereby interested so many potential patrons that, as there wasn't enough of me to go 'round, I finally engaged Vivien Kellems as a pinch hitter. As I write this, Vivien is a candidate for Congress, so I fancy she too profited by the experience.

One night in 1922 when I was speaking for John Haynes

Holmes in Community Church, the head of a lecture bureau, J. B. Pond, happened to be present and offered me ten engagements in Chicago. "I don't want to be a lecturer," I said. "I only wanted to be sure I could." "You're not sure you can do anything," Pond answered, "until you find whether people will pay you for it." When I returned East, I had filled more than a hundred engagements—usually at \$50 or \$75—in what is called the Chicago District. J. B. took me under his wing for the following season. When I asked him why people seemed anxious to hear me, he replied, "You don't put your hand in your coat front."

*That* represented more grist. As a youth I had heard many speakers, and became impatient of what, wherever it is employed, might be described as "the pulpit manner." Even now it can drive me from any auditorium or to tune out any radio. "Why can't a man talk to an audience as he would talk to friends in his library?" I wondered. "Why can't he be simple and sincere and colloquial?" After addressing his class at Yale I asked William Lyon Phelps whether he had been shocked at the amount of slang I used. "No," said Billy. "I know why you use it: to break down sales resistance." My first recommendation to any speaker or writer is "Be yourself." There is no better way of breaking down sales resistance than by showing that you do not regard yourself as God's gift to a waiting world. The most helpful trick I ever learned is that of beginning every lecture with two or three minutes of laughing at myself.

When I found the theater shot from under me in 1932, I had already enjoyed an even decade under the Pond management, speaking when I was not otherwise occupied and averaging a gross return of not more than five or six thousand dollars a year. However, my fee had increased to a minimum of a hundred dollars, and often reached two or three hundred. Changing one's profession at the age of fifty-two is a serious matter. I had always boasted that I could take care of myself on a desert island, and even now I derive comfort from the reflection that, if and when people stop reading and listening to addresses, I can make a living as a barkeep, a swimming instructor or a chauffeur. Two fields seemed wide open to me: magazines and the lecture platform. I had earned as much as six or eight thousand dollars a year from the first and comparable

sums from the second—both in my spare time. If I devoted myself now to these two callings, I should be sure of a good income.

Greatly as I have wanted to be sure of that, and for various reasons, it is equally true that I have always regarded money as a secondary consideration. I never applied for an injunction to prevent anyone paying me, but on the other hand I hope no publisher or manager ever discovers that I should go on writing and speaking whether I were paid or not. If there was, as there seemed to be, a prejudice against teaching and preaching on the stage, surely there could be none against doing both by means of the printing press and the platform. Arthur Wing Pinero once expressed to me the fear that he had written himself “through the roof of the theater,” but—regrettable as it seemed—the roof of the theater might be only the basement of the lecture hall and the publishing house.

I was still passionately a crusader, full of convictions I wanted to express—or, if I could do no better, send by freight. Among the deepest of these was the belief that “dirt is matter out of place” in books and plays, and that the so-called sophistication of this period—the denial of everything established and revered—was foolish and dangerous. I have written here of the true meaning of such words as “reactionary,” and I was then as anxious to say that the *Century Dictionary* defines “sophistication” as “the process of perverting or misleading by sophistry; a leading or going astray.” In November 1931 the *Ladies' Home Journal* had published my essay, “Shining Armor,” in which I had written, “Tenderness and loyalty and self-sacrifice and devotion to duty are natural aspirations. There are more trumpets in the world than police whistles, and more heroes than gunmen and loose ladies. Anyway, the gunmen and loose ladies don't matter. The wood-haulers and rail-splitters do. A literature that makes their examples glamorous is the literature that makes men and women fine, and nations great.” When that edition of the magazine had been exhausted, the *Ladies' Home Journal* printed a million copies of the essay in pamphlet form, and even then failed to satisfy the demand.

I felt the time ripe for debunking the debunkers, and went at it with pen and voice. There was nothing new in what I said, of course; there has never been anything new in what I said, or in what anyone else said—with very few exceptions. There is certainly

nothing new in the doctrine of anarchy and self-indulgence. Obviously, most people agreed with me, but were being shamed into unwillingness to admit it. When I appeared at Mount Holyoke College, President Woolley remarked to me, "Every word you spoke has been spoken hundreds of times by our teachers, but you made decency respectable." During a decade of harping on this theme I found public opinion rapidly changing. An audience in the College of the City of New York that had jeered Tennyson as a "purveyor of pious platitudes," three years later applauded quotations from the finest parts of his works. The cult of "sophistication" is now as dead as the dodo. I didn't kill it, but I may have helped. There never was one more harmful. In a recent book, *Guide Posts in Chaos*, I observed, "One of our best newspaper columnists ascribes this 'national degenerative disease' to loss of faith due to 'debunking' of our great men, our institutions and our unwritten laws. Dr. Harry N. Wright, newly elected president of the College of the City of New York, says, 'We have done much to promote skepticism, but our boys and girls—and ourselves, too—want something in which they can believe.' Dean Russell, of Teachers College, complains that this promotion of skepticism has undermined the morale of our youth. Thus, belatedly, distinguished opinion has got around to the view of a philosophy of negation as to the dangers of which I have been crying in the wilderness of the past two decades."

I have done a lot of tilting at windmills during my twenty years on the platform, and found that a good many of them can be brought down. On the day the Eighteenth Amendment was ratified, I said in St. Paul: "Not only can this law not be enforced, but it will instigate, organize and finance crime to an extent hitherto unknown." I carried this battle to Congress, speaking by invitation of the House Judiciary Committee, and, I hope, contributed a few grains of sand to the grave of an experiment "noble in purpose," but unworkable. Debating with Earl Browder for Town Hall of the Air in 1939, I made exactly the charge as to subversive influences in our schools afterward sustained by the Rapp-Coudert Committee. From 1936, in a lecture called "Wake Up, America," I called attention to the smugness and complacency of our country now

stressed by Supreme Court Justice Roberts and many others. In Houston, Texas, the first day of the present war I predicted the invasion of Norway, Belgium and Holland, and the fall of France, and insisted that immediate and ample aid to Britain afforded the only chance to "keep us out of war." Since 1930 my lectures have dealt chiefly with political and economic questions, and with what seems to me a suicidal drift to collectivism.

After that speech in Houston a lady listener rose to inquire whether I was "in the pay of the munitions interests." One of the most alarming trends I have noted during the past ten years is a new and growing unwillingness to permit any expression of opinion not your own. In Pennsylvania, just before Pearl Harbor, a chairman warned me against advocating aid to Britain, "because we don't believe in that up here." I told him I had come under the mistaken impression that the audience wanted to hear what *I* believed. There is an increasing disposition not to take issue with a speaker but to heckle, threaten, and, if possible, silence him. If this spirit is permitted to develop, we shall have reached the end of instruction and free speech. At this moment I am involved in an almost incredible effort at suppression. An organization of teachers, resenting my suggestion that there may still be subversive elements in our schools, has instigated a boycott against me and against my present manager, Harold Peat. Teachers have written my publishers threatening to extend the boycott to my books, and to editors warning them not to print my articles. An enormous majority of our teachers are ignorant of this matter, of course, but as Arthur Garfield Hays has warned its sponsors, such a boycott is as illegal as it is un-American. Equally of course, the chance of silencing me is precisely *nil*.

Increasing faith in "the power of the spoken word" has largely increased the platform's share in my recent activities. During the season of 1935-1936, I spoke 41 times in 26 different cities; during that of 1940-1941 I spoke 161 times in 112 different cities. The financial return is still somewhat less than that from writing, and the labor is infinitely greater and more arduous, but there are other rewards. One, I think, is satisfaction of vanity. Applause for what one has written comes after the writing has grown cold, and is for something apart from one's self. The applause at a lecture is for one's self, and follows the effort while one is still in the heat and

enthusiasm of creation. Speaking itself is secondary effort; it is the essential travel and the insistence of well-meaning greeters and hosts that exhaust the lecturer before he steps on the platform. Not long ago, at nine in the morning I reached a small city in Michigan. I had spoken in Ohio the previous evening, had been entertained until after midnight, and had risen in darkness and utter weariness for a train leaving shortly after 5:00 A.M. My lecture in Michigan was to begin at 2:00 P.M., and I had high hopes of a bath, a shave, a little rest and a sandwich in solitude.

None of these hopes was realized. Three charming but unwelcome ladies met me at the railway station with plans for an elaborate luncheon in my honor. A dozen guests had been invited. At last the ladies left me, but every time I got a foot into the tub someone else called—usually unannounced. First it was a newspaper reporter, then a clergyman and finally the mayor, who gave me the Freedom of the City. I didn't want the Freedom of the City. I didn't, and don't know what to do with it. I wanted a bath. I never got it—at least not that day. Unbathed and unshaved, I tried to be bright and snappy at luncheon, bright and snappy again for an hour and a half on the platform, and then to carry what remained of my brightness onto an afternoon train and into another lecture that evening in Detroit. In Spokane two seasons ago I had got at long last under a shower, in the customary costume or lack of it, when a newspaper cameraman flung open the outer door, crying, "Come on and be photographed with Ruth Bryan Owen!"

As you may have gathered, I am accustomed to hard work, but none has ever compared with that on the platform. Henry Morgenthau, our former ambassador to Turkey and father of our present Secretary of the Treasury, told me he got vitality from an audience as Antaeus did from touching the earth; *I* always feel as though I had cut an artery and was bleeding to death. An hour's talk, with a period for questions afterward, leaves me limp, wet and weary. And I have lectured five times in a single day! That 1922 stay in the Chicago District ended by my bursting into tears whenever Pond telegraphed an additional engagement. Once he wired, "YOU ARE BOOKED FOR LECTURE AT AMES, IOWA, FOR \$250. WILL YOU DO TWO FOR \$400?" I replied that I wouldn't do two for four *thousand* dollars. On Sunday, at Ames, the chairman phoned an invitation

to attend a public dinner. I couldn't say I had a previous engagement; *no one* ever had a previous engagement in Ames! As I finished dining the chairman announced, "I'm sure Mr. Pollock would like to say a few words to us." I obliged, and back in New York described the event to Pond who exclaimed, "Why, you damned fool, that was the talk for which you were to receive the extra \$150!"

Any professional speaker could write a book of humorous anecdotes from his experience. Many of these, however, would be duplications. An amusing incident of my first tour has been related so often since, and as the adventure of so many of my fellows, that I hesitate to repeat it. Pond had assigned me to a settlement house in Chicago, where the audience was so out-at-elbows that I decided I couldn't take the fee. I told the chairman privately that I should like him to use it for the institution. Violating my confidence, he announced to the audience, "Mr. Pollock has been kind enough to donate his fee to our treasury, so now we can afford some *good* speakers." It was in Chicago, too, that a bulletin board outside a church promised, "Channing Pollock and ICE CREAM"—with the ice cream featured! In the Plymouth Theater, Boston, I found on the lectern a small program that complied with the rules of the fire department rather devastatingly. It read: "Channing Pollock. This theater, when filled, can be emptied in three minutes. Look around *now*, choose the nearest exit, and, in case of need, walk—do not run—to that exit."

Occasionally there are experiences less laughable. Covering that Chicago District, I found it wise to engage a car by the month. Every Monday I received my week's contracts from Pond and gave them to the chauffeur. Often I didn't know where I was going until I got there. One night we drove through stone gates and spacious grounds to a building that looked like a country club. A manservant ushered me into what I took for an anteroom, where, presently, I was joined by six men and women in evening clothes. After a chat I suggested it was time to greet my audience. "*We* are your audience," a lady explained. "There isn't anyone else. You see, we got tired of going to Chicago for lectures, and as we could afford it, we decided to bring the lecturers to us." I'm not sure yet why this explanation left me feeling like a lackey. It's one thing, I sup-

pose, to be hired for a public appearance, and another to be paid for talking to half a dozen people in a drawing room. One of this group was Julius Rosenwald, the merchant and philanthropist, who did his utmost to put me at ease, but for a minute or two, my impulse was to say what Wilton Lackaye said when, after a half hour's introduction, a chairman announced, "Mr. Lackaye will now give his address." Lackaye remarked, "My address is the Lamb's Club, New York, and I'm just going there." In the end I draped myself gracefully over a piano and did my best.

A lecturer resolved to speak his mind may find himself in even more trying circumstances—and I don't mean boycotts. At the height of the Ku Klux Klan movement in the South, angered at evidences of this un-Americanism, I insisted upon addressing a Memphis audience on the subject of "The Black Ignorance of Intolerance." The president of the institution that had engaged me said, "80 per cent of your listeners will be Klansmen, and, if you deliver the speech you read to me, you'll be shot before you leave the platform." I wasn't shot, but for over an hour I spoke in a deathlike stillness. There wasn't a laugh or a handclap. When I finished, I thought the longest walk I had ever taken was that from the center of the stage to the exit. I left that building by the freight elevator, and four policemen escorted me to my hotel.

A few years ago when I was lecturing on Communism, I opened my door, expecting a bellboy with ice water, to find myself facing a bulky and menacing figure. Of course I shut the door promptly, and just as a pair of brass knuckles smashed the panel. With this in mind, the following week in Corpus Christi, Texas, I wasn't too happy at finding a man following me down a dark street to the railway station. I recognized him as a heckler who had become purple with rage that evening when I turned one of his insulting remarks into a laugh at his expense. The fellow was a big Russian; he had looked to be about six feet tall when he rose in the auditorium, but in that dark street I thought him ten feet high if he was an inch. I slowed down and he followed suit; I quickened my pace, and he quickened his. No one else was in sight. "Star shows where the body was found," I reflected, and halted, to get it over. The Russian gripped my shoulder with a hand the size of a ham.



"I've been following you," he declared.

"I know it."

"Yes," said the Russian. "I wanted to apologize. I was awful rude to you in the hall."

"Brother," I answered, "would you like a drink?—because I *need* one!"

We drank together, and then my new friend carried my luggage to the train.

There is pleasure and profit in many of the contacts made on tour, and in spite of that endless and exhausting round of entertainment. I wonder why no one ever proposes giving you a dinner until you don't need it! I wonder why local groups fail to realize that they are not the only hospitable people on earth, and that while lunching and dining out occasionally may be delightful, doing it every day in conjunction with hard work and travel may sap the vitality without which any lecture is disappointing. I have never known an actor who would attend a luncheon or dinner before a matinee or evening performance, but almost every lecturer is expected to do that before *his* performance—a one-man show for which he alone is responsible, and in which he has no assistance of supporting cast, plot, music or scenery!

Travel is hard, and will be harder as this war continues. Long ago the railways abandoned many trains, and one makes difficult and uncomfortable journeys by motor, bus, or in antiquated day coaches that were never coupled to a diner. One eats when and where one can, departs or arrives at ghastly hours, changes cars or busses half a dozen times in a day, performs acrobatic feats taking off evening clothes and readying morning dress in an upper berth—and then bounds onto the platform smiling and full of vim and vigor! During the better part of a fortnight last season, my latest train left before daylight, and after an evening lecture I was driven ninety miles over icy roads in exactly ninety minutes to catch a 1:50 A.M. express from Toledo to Cincinnati. One flies when one can, but occasionally a plane grounded by weather leaves an audience without a lecturer, and many contracts forbid flying. Navigation of the air, however, has made possible engagements that couldn't be filled otherwise. At two o'clock one Monday afternoon I spoke in San Francisco, at four o'clock Tuesday I was broadcast by

radio from New York, and at noon Wednesday lectured at Dallas, Texas!

Even now, a fairly large number of hotels leave much to be desired. There are still what Bill Nye called slippery-elm towels in Mansion Houses and similar caravansaries. Many of these have no restaurants, and sometimes that's lucky. I have been served pie and fried oysters for breakfast in the Nifty Café or the Dew Drop Inn. Once—only once—in a small town in Pennsylvania, I slept with nothing but a sheet between my person and a woven-wire spring, and rose looking like a waffle iron!

However, all these experiences keep you alive—even the worst of them. You wake in the night asking yourself, "Why am I doing this?" and swearing to do it no more, and then you go on doing it. Revenue and human vanity aside, you know you are a wiser man and a better author for climbing out of your ivory tower. That tower may be a longed-for study in New York, and you may have wide associations there, but these are likely to be exclusively people of your own kind and occupation, and, its own opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, New York is *not* America! No one can travel thirty-five or forty thousand miles a year, into every state in the Union, without broadening his vision and understanding. No one can meet an average of a hundred strangers a day, in all walks of life and of various classes, degrees of intelligence and scales of importance and solvency—Easterners, Westerners, Northerners and Southerners—without acquiring new comprehension of and added respect and sympathy for our common humanity.

Radio speaking is something else again yet. Personally, I love it. Once you get over the idea that the microphone is a dead thing and realize that you are actually talking to millions of people, you warm to the task. During the several months when I was broadcasting over a national network weekly chats on sane living, my sponsors, the H. J. Heinz Company, and I received an average of more than 10,000 letters a week. Many of these were extremely interesting. One of them came from a lighthouse keeper hundreds of miles off the coast; several from convicts in prisons. A telephone message to the studio begged me to send a copy of my talk to an address in Park Avenue. "My sister lost her right arm and right leg recently, and nothing reconciled her until she heard you speak on

'Making the Best of It.' " Acting as conciliator on A. L. Alexander's Mediation Hour has given me contact with amazing people and heartbreaking problems.

Radio suffers two handicaps: The agreement of sponsors with movie magnates that "the public has a fourteen-year-old mind," and government censorship. As to the first, actually I think, hundreds of thousands of radio listeners are as weary of jazz bands, wise-cracking comedians, and quiz hours as millions of movie-goers are tired of sex and sin. The second handicap is more serious. Whatever one calls it, the threat inherent in requirement that station licenses must be renewed at short intervals constitutes censorship. Long before this war, every official of the wireless was scared to death of any statement that might annoy Washington. After the first performance of *The Enemy*, President Wilson's adviser, Colonel Edward M. House, spent an hour in my office and quoted to me a remark he attributed to Wilson: "All the sword-rattlers I ever saw were in safe places." A week later I was shut off the air for repeating this comment of the President of the United States! More recently, a great corporation engaged me to broadcast thirteen addresses on the part industry has played in the development of America. The contract was never signed because all concerned were afraid "they'll crack down on us"! Since I can't speak in fetters, I prefer the lecture platform, where if you'll face the music you may still unburden your mind, subject only to the limitations of law, fairness and good taste.

However, I think every speaker and manager will admit that lecturing is a killing business. That I've stood it twenty years, during which I've spoken nearly three thousand times, is due to an iron constitution and to the fact that so far as possible I take care of myself. My work with *The Fool*, in combination with that in the Chicago District, brought me to grief early in 1923. Recuperating in Madrid, I received from a well-known bureau an invitation to come under its management. An enclosed circular presented a list of the bureau's chief attractions. Propped up in bed, to which I had been consigned by my own lecturing, I read: "IRVIN COBB, FAMOUS HUMORIST. Following his most successful season, Mr. Cobb is at present undergoing hospital treatment in California, but expects to return to the platform next autumn. WILL IRWIN, NOTED

WAR CORRESPONDENT. Mr. Irwin delivered more than a hundred lectures last year. He is suffering now from a painful stomach ailment. However, he is on the road to recovery. DR. LOUIS ANSPACHER, POET AND PHILOSOPHER. Dr. Anspacher recently had a nervous breakdown, but . . ." Every man but two on the list was temporarily *hors de combat*! I wired the bureau, "THANKS OFFER BUT AM THROUGH LECTURING."

Three months later I was back on the platform. So were Irvin Cobb, and Will Irwin, and all the rest of them. Not even slippery-elm towels can keep a good man down!

## THE SERIOUS YEARS

THROUGHOUT these busy years I had continued writing short stories and articles, largely for the *American Magazine*, and soon after I decided to abandon the theater, John Phillips proposed that I attempt a novel. Phillips was one of the few great editors I have known. He had purchased the first stories by Kipling published in America, and shared with Bob Davis, of *Munsey's*, the credit for discovering or developing many other authors of note. In 1906 John had gone from *McClure's* to the *American*, where he remained until 1937, though Sumner Blossom took active charge in 1929.

As you know, I had produced my first and until then my last novel while I was a lad in Washington, and it hadn't encouraged me to further effort in this direction. Now, however, I was groping for new employment, and John's offer to buy serial rights started me off again. For some time, I had thought that Olga Petrova's success in assuming an exotic personality and as a result of it suggested a tale, and my experience as a press agent supplied the rest of the material. At Shoreham in 1932, therefore, I worked out details of the imaginary romance of a resourceful publicity man, Packy O'Rourke, who won a bet that he could make a profitable star out of any girl who passed in the street. As a joke, his opponent picked out a young woman who couldn't speak English. "O. K.," said Packy; "I might have failed with an American, but with a Russian this bet's a cinch!"

Under the title of *Star Magic*, this novel appeared in the *American Magazine*, and then in book form under the imprint of Farrar and Rinehart. It was a good story, I think, with a colorful background and considerable satire, and proved sufficiently successful

to be followed by a second, *Synthetic Gentleman*, also issued in the *American Magazine* and by Farrar and Rinehart, and a third, *Tinsel*, in *Liberty*. By this time, however, I had confirmed my suspicion that I am not a novelist. My mind runs to action rather than to contemplation of character, and all three of these stories had too much bone and too little flesh. I hope to do better some day, and if only as an exercise in writing, I want to treat as fiction the interesting disintegration of a friend who married for the money to give him a start, earned a fortune, and then was destroyed by the wife he had taken for purely mercenary reasons. In the thirties, however, after trying my hand at this trio of tales and a mystery novelette that I called "Murder Mosaic" and the *American* called "The Professor's Alibi," I turned to other fields. Since then I have written and published many short stories but no other long one.

With characteristic kindness John Farrar advised me, "Your readers expect from you help in the problems of living, and I'm afraid you'd better stick to that kind of effort." Whether or not he was right, the determination to do just that, and only that, was what had made my position in the theater untenable, and it seemed absurd now to change my medium in order to go on doing the trifling things I could have done better and more profitably for the stage. "The Professor's Alibi" was another *The Sign on the Door*; it would have made an excellent play of the very type with which I had kept the favor of critics who resented my later work. Many of my short stories have followed the pattern of that later work, though I can never resist any plot that seems to me ingenious and dramatic.

One of my most fortunate excursions into this field came of an experience in London. J. B. Priestley and I were lunching with Elaine Ainley, who was late and explained that she had been detained by an acquaintance we may call Nora O'Brien. This woman, Elaine said, had gone flat-hunting, and, given the key, had entered a supposedly vacant apartment just as a girl in the front room stuck a knife into the throat of her male companion. Returning with the police, Miss O'Brien found the apartment really vacant, and without any of the furniture she had seen in it. A fortnight afterward, at a dinner party, she met this girl with the man she had seemed to kill. "I saw that woman stab that man," Miss O'Brien exclaimed

to her hostess, "two weeks ago in a flat at 72 D Gower Street!"

"Nonsense!" the hostess replied. "They had never seen each other until I introduced them this evening."

Dubious of her own sanity, Miss O'Brien spent the winter in North Africa, and returning to London the morning of our luncheon, had read in a newspaper that the woman and man in question were to be married, and "will be at home after May 1st in an apartment they have just taken at 72 D Gower Street." Elaine's acquaintance had held her to ask, "Shall I warn them?" Priestley and I flipped a coin for the rights to this story. I won, and Sumner Blossom printed the yarn in the *American* under the title of "Preview."

Most magazine editors, I think, are victims of the radio-and-movie delusion as to the "fourteen-year-old mind." There is plenty of that in America, heaven knows. Long ago I complained of the handicap of writing English for a nation that doesn't speak it. The depth of ignorance in a very large part of our population, its lack of imagination and interest in things of the mind and spirit, leaves one asking why and how a democracy is possible. Our best hope, however, would seem to lie in giving even that public a little better than it is supposed to want, and there certainly is a middle ground between the dry and somewhat sterile high-brow periodicals of small circulation and the puerility and sensationalism of some of the low-browed. The *Saturday Evening Post* has proved this, and, more irrefutably, the *Reader's Digest*.

De Witt Wallace, owner and editor of the *Digest*, is one of the most remarkable men and one of the most public-spirited I know. He is forever trying to add to our information, and to improve our tastes and behavior. Nevertheless, the *Reader's Digest* boasts the largest circulation in magazine history—and probably has more than it boasts. De Witt conceived the plan for this periodical while he was in the trenches during the First World War. Returning, he tried vainly to raise capital for the experiment. Wallace never made good his promise to give me a list of the prominent publishers who rejected the idea as without value. His ultimate success, of course, was enormous—as it should have been. I used to think the *Digest* another attempt to supply lazy minds with superficial knowl-

edge without effort on their part; now I recognize it as an essential timesaver for quite another type of mind. Its condensation of material omits little of value, and I have learned much by reading articles as I wrote them and again as compressed for this magazine.

Many editors, of course, are as uninspired and uninformed—not to say as self-important—as many critics. Long ago, after one of them had rejected a dozen potential stories outlined to him at luncheon, I wickedly suggested to him as more of my own invention some of the finest tales in our literature. These he liked less than those that were really mine. Finally, rising, he remarked, “You’re not at your best today, Channing.”

“No,” I replied, “and neither are Balzac, De Maupassant and Somerset Maugham.”

Of course I never sold another story to that magazine.

George Horace Lorimer was my idea of a great editor; so, before success unbalanced his brain and brought about his suicide, was Ray Long. One of Ray’s last acts on the *Cosmopolitan* was to preface a story of mine with a sentence reading, “Channing Pollock told me this,” and then print it as “By Ray Long.” John Phillips and Bob Davis were great editors; there are now none better than Sumner Blossom of the *American* and Mrs. William Brown Meloney of *This Week*, while Fulton Oursler did much that I disapprove but that largely increased the circulation of *Liberty*. All these are people with whom I have had long and close association. There may be many others equally good, but unknown to me. The common limitation of editors, I think, is inability to get away from the conventional, and the type of thing identified with their particular periodicals. Many years ago I wagered ten dollars with Bob Davis that if he would repeat to me the tritest and most commonplace story of his experience, I’d sell it to one of the major magazines within a month—and I won.

Perhaps it was because of my new comparative leisure, and perhaps because of events of that year, that with my retirement from the theater I began to be interested in our government. Up to that time I had voted rarely, offering the specious excuse that my ballot was canceled by the first moron who followed me. This is no place for setting forth my political views, but I may say that I was and am profoundly distrustful of certain philosophies and of our admitted



trend toward state socialism. More and more my lectures have been devoted to these discussions, and when Paul Palmer became editor of the *American Mercury*, I began writing for him a series of articles that represented my birth as a publicist. The most widely successful of these were "America Doesn't Give a Damn," "The Survival of the Unfittest," "The Workers vs. 'The Workers,'" "Forgotten Men," "Two Thirds of a Nation," "Apology for Success," and "I Am a Reactionary." When Palmer quit, I lost interest in the *American Mercury*.

By this time, however, I had greatly extended my activities. De Witt Wallace had suggested my writing directly for the *Reader's Digest*, and several of my articles in his magazine inspired wide comment—notably "The World's Slow Stain," "As the Greatest Only Are," "One Man Power," and, more especially, "Heaven Doesn't Matter" and "Why I Don't Go to Church," which last brought us 60,000 letters—chiefly of protest. Religion always has been a dangerous subject, and politics is increasingly so. It seems to me unfortunate that *any* subject cannot be discussed peacefully and sincerely, and especially among a people who are fighting abroad for continuance of the right to oppose their own government and worship their own God. Wallace once told me that publishing a proposed essay as to my religious convictions would be "the surest way I know to lose a million circulation." This would be a more truly Christian world, perhaps, if we had been more willing to consider the other man's faith and less eager to destroy it and him.

From its foundation, I had done a good deal of writing—chiefly fiction—for *This Week*. Mrs. Meloney and I had been cub reporters together on the *Washington Post*—though she was an even younger cub than I. She is one of the ablest and most amazing women I ever met, but her story cannot be written while she lives. I tried it once for the *Reader's Digest*, but Missy's modesty intervened, and I had my trouble for my pains. With *This Week*, and—she would insist—inspired assistance, Missy triumphed with a plan that had failed the Associated Sunday Magazines. This plan was for a weekly edited and published in New York, but backed by and distributed as a part of twenty-five or thirty Saturday evening or Sunday morning newspapers throughout America. Its circulation is now close to six million.

Sumner Blossom had invited me to contribute a "guest editorial," which, captioned "The Indians Are Shut Out," appeared in the *American* for August 1937. This essay restored me to my favorite field—writing simple and anecdotal homilies on what I persist in calling sane living. With a list of more than a hundred subjects for these, I proposed supplying a series of them to the *American*, but an associate editor turned me down flat. "All that has been said for thousands of years," he said, "and everyone knows it." I urged Papini's wise dictum in his *Life of Christ*, that truth needs restating in every generation and in the terms of that generation, but the associate editor was skeptical, and I went to Mrs. Meloney. *This Week* printed the first of the essays in September 1940, and has since published about fifty of them. With additions they have been issued in book form, *Guide Posts in Chaos*, by the Thomas Y. Crowell Company and represent, I think, some of the most effective writing I have ever done. Meanwhile—to make the record complete—Crowell had published another volume of my essays, *The Adventures of a Happy Man*, every word of which had been penciled on lecture tours, in planes, trains and hotels. That, perhaps, is the answer to the title of one of the essays—"How Big Is a Minute?"

Unfortunately, however, there are only so many minutes in a day, and I have made no effort to expand my magazine market. For editors who are friends and with whom my relations have been long and pleasant, I write an average, perhaps, of 100,000 words a year. At my rate of speed this requires almost a hundred days, which is all I can give to it. My lectures occupy another hundred, or more. Writing books, together with countless other activities, takes the rest of my time, though I still work ten or twelve hours a day and seven days a week. More than ever, I regard money as a by-product. One of my favorite editors is Leland Case, of the *Rotarian*, who can pay only a pittance but who printed what I continue to regard as my best essay, "Reflections in Radio City Music Hall." After I had quit the professional theater I turned out three one-act plays, "Winner Lose All," "The Shot That Missed Lincoln" and "The Captains and the Kings," merely because I enjoyed doing so. They are published by the Walter Baker Company and acted by amateurs.

My interest in problems of everyday living, in social and economic problems, and in government has come to be dominant. My

view as to these remains the unpopular view, and as always that has kept me battling against odds. I suppose I should feel lost without a fight on my hands; I never have had the opportunity to find out. No one who has not read George Sokolsky or Eugene Lyons on the subject, the latter notably in his book *The Red Decade*, can have the faintest conception of the forces that oppose any writer who fails to lean heavily to the left. There are established and prominent publishing houses in our country that would not under any conditions issue the work of such a man. Many of our magazines and periodicals follow suit, or eliminate whatever they regard as not sufficiently "liberal." Worst of all, there exists what might almost be called a conspiracy on the part of newspaper reviewers to ignore or condemn the books of "reactionaries." Our unpopularity with these powers-that-be ranks with that I used to enjoy as an opponent of raw literature. One of the outstanding critics in New York dismissed my first novel with the three-word comment, "A clean book."

As I said of politics, this is no place for dissertation on Communism and other branches of collectivism in America, but at least there is one curious and almost amusing side to the question. Even now, when we have a military alliance with Russia, an overwhelming majority of our citizens have no faith in Communism and no sympathy with the collectivists. We are a nation of property owners and individualists. Moreover and obviously, outside of our government, by far the greatest influence and power is that of our intellectuals and our moneyed class. The former have gone over to the enemy, horse, foot and artillery. "Why?" is a question that calls for psychoanalysis. No group would lose more by the establishment of absolutism. The explanation, I suppose, is that many of our so-called intelligentsia suffer from a sense of frustration, and that many more are mere theorists, lacking practical experience. Their minds are wheels without cogs, revolving rapidly but ineffectually.

The solvent among us—big business, small merchants, white-collar workers and professional men—do not know what is happening, do not care, or have given up hope. This is our most serious breakdown. What should be the best-informed element of our population reads nothing but easy pieces for little minds. Of history,

sociology, economics and government it is as ignorant as any native in the Congo. At intervals it can be roused to anger and action about something relatively unimportant, like the proposal that Congressmen vote themselves pensions, but legislation threatening their very existence and that of their children and grandchildren stirs them far less than a baseball score. The slogan of the whole crowd seems to be "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." They neither see nor understand the close and systematic organization, or the fanatical zeal of the termites that are undermining the republic. A minority that has little property, less wisdom and no responsibility; empty of plan but full of envy and hatred—a crowd of impractical dreamers that, as individuals, never achieved anything in their lives—this minority marches on, almost unopposed, to destroy everything that has made for the greatness and happiness and prosperity of our nation.

Every effort at creating an organization comparable with that of these forces has proved futile. And yet, since most people read nothing of importance, and since the radio and other channels of normal publicity are in the grip of the foe, any successful counter-attack must begin with organization. My passion for individual freedom and opportunity being greater than my capacity, in 1941 I walked in where angels had feared—or failed. To ten audiences in California I stated my faith, and then asked those who shared it and were willing to fight for it to send me their names and addresses. I pledged myself to nothing except doing my utmost, and stipulated that I would read no communications and make no acknowledgment or report. My ten audiences numbered about as many thousands of persons—and I received nearly four thousand names and addresses!

This seemed to me almost a mandate, and I carried my enrollment to the East. From four or five hundred cheering listeners belonging to the Chamber of Commerce at Wheeling, West Virginia, I got one post card. Eleven equally enthusiastic groups between Nebraska and New York added sixteen names to my list. We must begin, I thought, with a responsible Board of Directors—one with no axes to grind and commanding confidence and respect. I wrote fifty outstanding citizens, explaining the situation and the fact that, having little fitness for leadership, I wanted only to serve. Of the

twenty-two who replied, nine were willing to work in the cause, nine were "too busy," and four thought our country was doomed and that nothing could be done about it.

There seemed no way to proceed, and no use trying, so I abandoned the project. However, during the early spring of 1942 I had luncheon and a long conference with Herbert Hoover, who urged me not to give up the ship. Mr. Hoover's grasp of the situation, his vision, and his suggestions for effective work seem to me the best and most promising of my limited experience, and once more my hat was in the ring. During the months in which I was writing *Guide Posts in Chaos*, most of my time was given to correspondence, conferences and meetings. There was a repetition of all the discouragements of the previous year, but there have been encouragements, too, and I have had the advantage of contact with some of the best brains in America. Thus, while the outcome is still uncertain, I cannot believe that my usefulness decreased when I left the theater, but only that it was broadened and flowed into deeper channels. Much—perhaps all—of the last third of my life may well be devoted to what, rightly or wrongly, from the bottom of my mind and heart, I believe to be a vital and essential struggle.

Of course as my work became more important I have had greater need for the education I missed. The result, however, adds to my belief that any man can get what he wants sufficiently. After all, it is not only in universities that books are available. Luckily, I began reading in childhood. I may have said elsewhere that, at fourteen, I had grounded myself fairly well in the English classics. Augustus Thomas taught me the trick of using odd moments for literary exploration—in offices and subways—and for myself I worked out a system of dividing reading into courses—a winter of ancient history and philosophy, a spring and summer of medieval thought and action, and so on. My wife, whose nose is seldom out of a book and who has mastered two languages, helps me with translations and digests. Every evening not otherwise engaged finds me in bed at nine o'clock with a swinging desk bearing a volume and a note pad in front of me. Taps are at 11:30, and one can take in a good deal of knowledge in two hours and a half. Travel has been of inestimable benefit. If one wanders about intelligently, with his eyes open, the result may be almost as helpful as reading. Particularly if one reads

in preparation for travel. My wife and I planned most of our journeys sufficiently in advance to study the history, literature, art and customs of the countries to be visited.

Sometimes my lack of formal schooling has led to amusing incidents. When in 1938 Colgate University conferred upon me the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters, as I have already stated, the dean spent an evening trying to find an academic background for his citation. "You graduated in Prague, didn't you?" he asked.

"No. I spent only three months in school there."

"But you did graduate from a college in Virginia?"

"No. I walked out on it in the middle of the night."

Finally the dean gave up and built his citation on a more solid foundation. Northeastern University, which four years later made me a Doctor of Laws, wisely refrained from going into my distant past. However, I spent most of that evening with the Chinese Ambassador to the United States, Dr. Hu Shih, and learned about scholarship from him. George Barton Cutten, former president of Colgate and one of the sanest men in America, once told me his opinion that "education is acquirement of character, cultural interests and the power to think logically," and on none of these do the universities hold a monopoly. The highest honor any of them could confer, perhaps, would be Doctor of Living.

In July 1938 my mother died of the same malady that killed my stepfather. Through the intervening years she had remained the same soft, kind and lovable companion, almost untouched by life. During most of this period she had occupied rooms in a hotel near us—chiefly because she liked people and wanted to be surrounded by them. I spent part of every afternoon with her, but evenings she sat in the lobby, holding a sort of endless reception. When she dined with us and she and I went to a theater, as we did every week, she was always anxious to get back to her hotel before the lobby was deserted. Mother joined as many societies for this-and-that as were available to her, and founded the Utah Club, of which she was proudly president. She was proudly a grandmother, too, and, above all else, proud of everything I did, good and bad alike. Financial considerations remained beyond her understanding. Money, Mother thought, was something that came when you wanted it. She

never wanted much for herself, but she gave so liberally that I was forever getting her out of debt, into which she plunged again with the first appeal to her generosity.

It never occurred to her that work had anything to do with accomplishment. Once when my brother John had undertaken the management of a second company in *My Best Girl*, the opening at New London was attended by a succession of almost unbelievable difficulties. An automobile indispensable to our first act proved too big to be got through the doors to the stage, and, after an allnight rehearsal John took it all over town before finding a factory where the car could be sawed in half and bolted together again. Weary and bleary, an hour before the curtain rose we joined a small dinner party Mother had arranged in the hotel. Lifting her glass, she said, "Here's to success tonight," as though that settled everything. We tried to tell her of the labors and vexations of the preceding twenty-four hours, but Mother wasn't listening. Why should her boys have had to work for results? With our gifts, surely it was enough to wish for them, and any doubt of the outcome must be resolved by drinking to "success tonight."

Nevertheless, Mother was lonely; like most mothers, perhaps, she would have been glad to have her brood at her knee again. She was still young at seventy-five, and then she began suffering pain that two different specialists diagnosed as arthritic. My own physician discovered the truth, but she never knew it. In her hospital room she sent for a dressmaker to plan her autumn wardrobe. For her birthday dinner, a week before her passing, she wanted a broiled lobster. "Why not?" said the doctor, so we shared the crustacean and a pint of champagne. Because of a cut in my lip, the doctor forbade my kissing Mother, and told her the reason was that I had a sore throat and might communicate it to her. As I left her one night, Mother exclaimed, "I'm going to take a chance on that sore throat!" After the kiss she clung to me a moment and said, "Thank God, I've had you." Next morning she was dead.

## WE GO PLACES

FOR two people who had earned their livings, and for one who continues to earn his living by incessant wandering, travel would seem to be a busman's holiday. However, journeys abroad and journeys at home are two different matters. No American feels that he is traveling when he sees America. Rightly, too, I think. Ours is the land of standardization—the same language, the same customs, and the same fruit cups.

Moreover, there's no fun and little other than financial profit in occupational travel. As my father left Austria to escape compulsory military service, and then volunteered for service in our own Army, so the trip that must be undertaken and the trip one wishes to undertake are not kindred in motives. Finally, with experience and maturity one's reason for travel changes. Within the few months of our first joint pilgrimage, my wife and I saw every cathedral in Europe. If we missed a ruin anywhere, it must have been so completely ruined as to be practically invisible. We walked hundreds of miles through palaces and picture galleries, acquiring a mental potpourri of Venuses, Virgins and venerable furniture. At last, in a small hotel in Sicily, my better half went on strike.

"No," she said wearily, "I won't get up. I won't catch the 8:04 train to Syracuse. I don't give a darn if I never set foot in another museum or art gallery. We've seen 7,000 Madonnas and at least 10,000 St. Sebastians shot full of arrows, and I don't remember any of 'em. I no longer know, or care, whether Cleopatra met Christopher Columbus at Versailles, Vesuvius or the Vatican, and I'm not going to pretend to care any more. The only thing that really interested me on this trip or that I recall with any real vividness was the Dutch peasant and his family with whom we spent the night in



Edam. *They* were alive. *They* were human. If you want the truth, I learned more in five minutes' chat with that woman than from all the guides we've followed through busted buildings between here and Liverpool."

Since then we haven't traveled to see pictures or palaces, but, as I had told Oscar Hammerstein, to see *people*, and to talk to them and know them. That first trip together, which was to have been in preparation for others, left us willing to stay home a dozen years. They were busy years; we were making our way, striving for financial security, and summering at Shoreham. Except when a breakdown sent me to Bermuda and the Bahamas, I worked hard and incessantly. Inevitably, we began thinking of a holiday. My wife, in whose veins ran the blood of generations of strolling players, grew restless and conspired with my father's brother, my Uncle Fred, to begin what were to be two decades of globe-trotting. With my daughter we idled about North Africa and Egypt, returning across Italy, Austria, Germany and France to England. This was a leisurely journey during which I confirmed the earlier suspicion, prompted by my wife, that even—or especially—in world wanderings "the proper study of mankind is man."

There are six hundred mosques in Cairo, and I've been in eight or nine of them—chiefly those that attracted me as I walked past or those that brought to mind some human and dramatic incident. But I've dawdled for hours on the terrace in front of Shepherd's or in Arab cafés, gossiping with donkey boys, camel drivers, Syrian merchants, and sailors from Bombay, Buenos Aires and Bremerhaven. I've loafed along the Nile and crossed the Arabian desert with a caravan. Again and again I've strolled alone through the *suks*, or bazaars, of the Near East, and lost myself on the hill called the Kasbah at Algiers, and in that Egyptian sink of iniquity, the Fishmarket, of which Baedeker remarks only, "Not recommended to Europeans." My interest in *that* began one hot afternoon in the Street of the Camel, where I saw an enormous Soudanese Negro, covered with jewelry, riding alone in the back of a \$15,000 limousine.

"Who's that?" I asked Marcus, my indefatigable dragoman.

"The King of the Fishmarket," Marcus replied, "and the rich-

est man in the country. His son was married recently, and the festival cost nearly a million pounds."

"Nonsense! How could a million pounds be spent on a wedding?"

"Easily," the guide answered. "The King took over every café, restaurant and hotel, and for a week food, drink and lodging were free to everyone in upper and lower Egypt."

"Do you mean," I persisted, "that decent people would accept the hospitality of a fellow who'd made his money that way?"

Marcus looked at me, wide-eyed. "He's a very rich man," he repeated. "Do *your* countrymen always ask where the money came from?"

Marcus' father was a Catholic, and his mother a Mohammedan, but Marcus himself provided a liberal education in the mental processes of the oriental. I recall his history of a mosque just outside Cairo.

"The land belonged to a widow, and the Caliph offered her five handfuls of gold for as much of it as could be covered by a camel's skin. Then he had the skin shredded, and upon the half-acre over which the shreds were laid he built this mosque."

"But," I objected, "why did he have to shred the camel's skin? Surely the widow would have sold half an acre of this land for five handfuls of gold."

Marcus shook his head sadly that anyone could suggest so prosaic a method of trading.

It was another guide, at Aswan, who reminded me that certain emotions are common to all men. He had been surly all morning, muttering imprecations against "pig-dog Christians." The Nationalist movement was in full tide; Winston Churchill had just been mobbed at Alexandria, and I scented trouble.

"Why don't you like Christians?" I ventured at last.

"Until *they* came, wives obeyed," the guide answered.

Gradually I learned that fundamentally, as my grandmother used to say, "People are much of a muchness." My very mixed ancestry had made any race prejudice improbable, but whatever came from my Southern forebears was soon routed out by experience. In the desert the Arab merchants were kindness itself, but they wouldn't eat with me, and in Haiti later, I had the same trouble

getting into a hotel that a Haitian, or other Negro, would experience here. Race prejudice becomes intolerable when you find it working both ways. It is natural, of course—everybody *must* feel superior to somebody—as the passion for self-government in backward nations, revived by Woodrow Wilson, is natural. One day during this upsurge of Egyptian Nationalism, a third guide explained the building of a huge and comparatively modern mosque in Cairo. Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of native workmen had toiled on the structure without pay; each local sheik was responsible for so many and remained to ply his whip when they lagged.

“But for the British that sort of thing might be going on now,” I suggested, “and you belong to the class that would suffer by it. Why, then, are you so anxious to be rid of the British?”

“We want our liberty,” the man said.

British colonial officials generally are honest and just, if quite as stupid as other bureaucrats. I have never heard of one lifting his hand against a native, but again and again I have seen Hindus and Egyptians lashed by their own petty chiefs, and without complaint. Nations, like individuals, seem unable to realize that rights and privileges must be earned; that they are more harmful than otherwise to the unqualified. No one can have seen India through clear eyes without understanding the chaos and catastrophe that would follow independence. The British have committed follies and crimes in India, heaven knows, but they are as nothing to the follies and crimes that would have been committed without them. I cannot imagine a more benighted and undependable people than the Hindus, nor one less fitted for self-government. It is not, after all, the uneducated lower class that has preserved the caste system, and the horror of the “untouchables,” or that drinks the sacred but filthy waters of the Ganges, or connives at the revolting rites in the Temples of Kali. These survivals of superstition and prejudice would make home rule dangerous to religious and other minorities, and even among the superior few they cannot be eradicated in a single generation. We had evidence of this fact aboard a vessel in the Red Sea, where, in his absence, I was taken into the cabin of one of the leaders of the All-Indian Congress. He was a highly educated man who had been graduated at Oxford. On his walls hung obscenities and glorifications of blood-lust in the name of religion incredible

in anyone but a savage. This is a subject for writers more versed than I, but no casual tourist can believe Hindu government the answer for India after he has seen the separate drinking fountains labeled "Water for Mohammedans" and "Water for Hindus." It would be as possible, and as peaceful, to turn over rule of Georgia or Alabama to the Negroes because they constitute a majority.

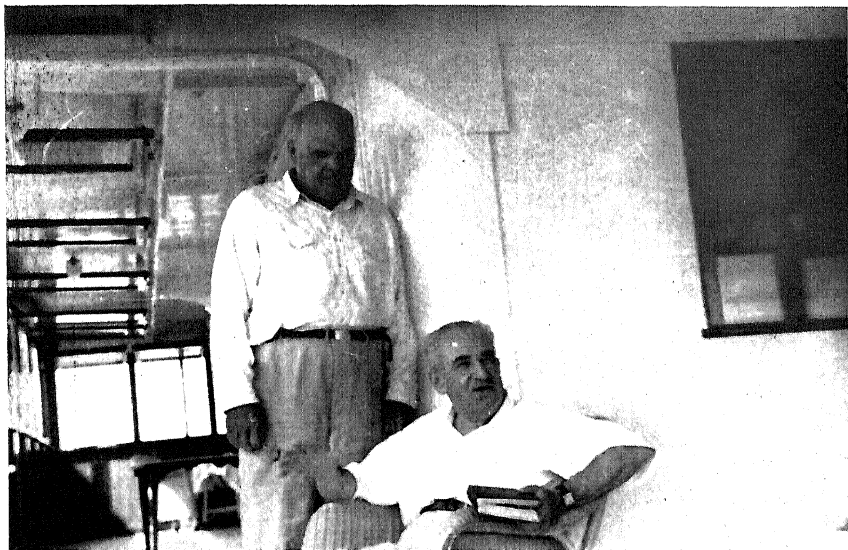
As aforesaid, everywhere I have found British rule enlightened and helpful, and that was true also of the Dutch. No subject race could have been more content than the Javanese and the Balinese. American control in the Philippines struck me as a model for any nation. The reverse was true in every colony held by the French; from Tunisia to Cambodia I found only exploitation and bitter resentment. The graft would have been a liberal education to Chinese—or Americans. In a city just outside Indo-China, I met a French Consul who had invented an epidemic of cholera across the border and refused visas to intending visitors until they had been inoculated by a French physician with whom he shared the fees.

In the foregoing I've scrambled the eggs of twenty years of travel. After our first journey to North Africa and Egypt, for a time we crossed the ocean only to produce plays or for what had become an annual holiday in France and England. Until 1933 Paris was the only place in the world where I could idle without remorse and enjoy it. For any except chronic loafers, loafing in our own country is impossible. One can't loaf successfully where everyone else is busy. When I take an hour off to stroll on Riverside Drive, I am constantly expecting to be arrested for vagrancy. In Paris I learned to spend long afternoons exploring quaint little streets, or in the gardens of the Tuileries or the Luxembourg, joining my family afterward for an hour at a sidewalk café. Then came the ritualistic delight of dinner in some little restaurant, an evening at a revue or a play, and a stroll homeward through magic and moonlit markets and short cuts. Paris is the only place on earth where I have ever remained in bed long after sunrise. At our Ste Marie I used to wake for the sound of farmwagons market-bound through the Rue de Rivoli, and then sleep until time for a breakfast-luncheon at the Bonne Auberge.

If you knew your way about, dining in Paris—well, words fail me! There is but one restaurant in America remotely comparable—Chez Antoine, in New Orleans, whose proprietor flattered me by inscribing on a menu, "For whom it is a privilege and pleasure to prepare a repast." In the beginning, of course, we shared the swanky and expensive Paillard's or Tour d'Argent with our fellow countrymen. Then, on an express from Vienna to Paris, I occupied a compartment with the first complete man of the world I had ever encountered. His name was De Mai, he was European agent for Canadian Pacific, and he had lived everywhere and spoke everything. From him I acquired an invaluable list of eating places that were not run for "foreigners." (I quote that word because I dislike it as much as any, except "alien." Until this war gave us new knowledge of what could be instilled into Germans and Japanese, I used to wonder how any member of the human race could be "foreign" or "alien" to another.)

I never knew how tempting the French cuisine could be until I began exploring De Mai's list of holes in the wall, with four or five tables, where the proprietor or his wife did the cooking and grew almost devout over the fowl or vegetables they showed you before carrying them to the kitchen. Places like the little old Escargot d'Or, in the Rue St Denis, where, instead of palateless spenders, one found Bernstein, the dramatist, and Mayol, the manager, and the American artists, Gilbert White and Jo Davidson. Seventy-five cents or a dollar paid for an excellent meal, with wine and brandy, at any of these resorts. The *patron* of the Escargot christened me *Monsieur Pis-en-lit* because of my fondness for dandelion salad. After a time he disappeared, and of course the new proprietor professed ignorance of his whereabouts. A year later, stumbling upon what to me was the best of all restaurants in Paris, back of the Madeleine, I was startled at being seized and kissed on both cheeks. "*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the owner. "If it isn't *Monsieur Pis-en-lit!*"

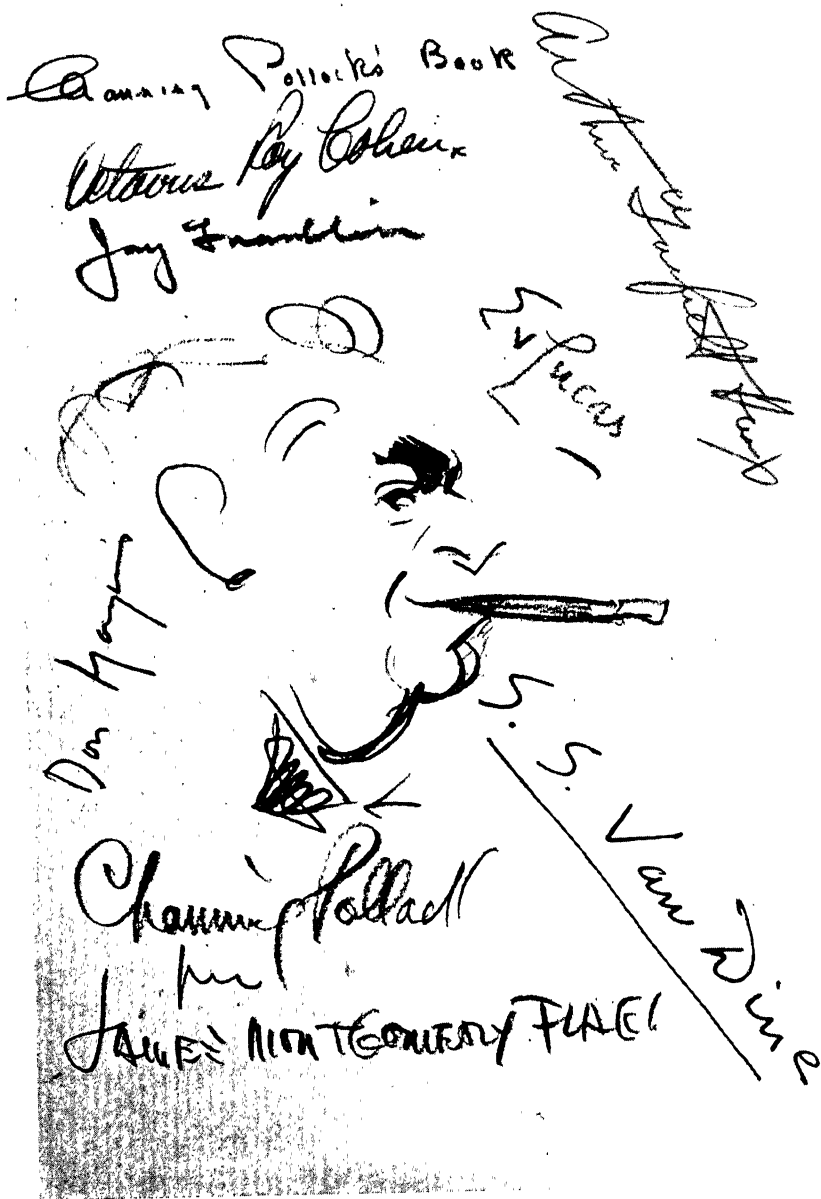
Gilbert White, who afterward became the center of a storm about his murals for the Department of Agriculture at Washington, turned up all over Europe before he settled in Paris. I spent a Christmas with him at Taormina, where he lived in a hotel, but had rented a villa so that he could enjoy the view from its garden. At a Spring Salon in Paris I encountered him in disreputable headgear. When I



# THE AUTHOR IN THE ORIENT

*At Top:* With Dr. Richard Sutton aboard the S.S. Tjissalak from Sourabaya to Hong Kong. *Below:* At the Great Wall of China.





A CARTOON OF THE AUTHOR

by James Montgomery Flagg made at a dinner of the Dutch Treat Club, and signed by various other guests at the table.

asked why he had decided to spend the rest of his life in Paris, Gilbert answered, "It's the only city on earth where I could wear this hat without anyone thinking me eccentric." That, at least, was to be said for the French. I never liked them so well as I liked their country, though I admit it was they chiefly who made their country likable. They were self-centered, self-satisfied, mercenary, parsimonious and possessed of their own rather quaint ideas of fair dealing—but they were artists in living. I never ceased being amused at their calling us "dollar-chasers." For more than thirty years we made the Hôtel Ste Marie our headquarters in Paris, and its proprietor credited us with a large share of his prosperity. That, however, did not prevent the doubling of our rates already mentioned when he found that we knew Rothschild. Once when he met us at the railway station, I asked for a match to light my cigar. "Take this box of matches," he said. At the end of the week, I found it on my bill—fifty centimes. It is always unwise to generalize about people, but this story seems to me typical.

In 1933 France had begun to disintegrate. Our prosperous friends were leaning heavily to Fascism, and labor had set its feet on the road that, three years later, led to the establishment of the Popular Front under Léon Blum. The dangerous curtailment of work hours had begun, and that friendliness which had been characteristic of the French and had compensated for so much was giving way to class hatred and resentment of almost everyone and everything. Two or three times we were greeted with a muttered "France for the French," though it wasn't until New Year's Day 1937 at Marseilles that crowds followed us through the streets with this cry. The restaurants were deserted and in the theaters the *décor*, always meager and shabby, had become depressingly inadequate. The revues at the Folies-Bergère and the Casino de Paris, once glittering exceptions to this rule, were so no longer. At the former house, where costumes and scenery had been bewilderingly beautiful, we sat through a first act of dresses that were ancient and soiled, and a last act chiefly devoted to a wrestling match. In one restaurant we were the only diners. The proprietor, an old friend, shared our table, telling us his troubles, and two days later shot himself.

The end of a dismal visit came one morning when I was sending



some clothes to be pressed, and the telephone brought news from Frankfort of the suicide there of a woman we loved. That had nothing to do with political or economic conditions, but while I was receiving the message a tailor took out my clothes, and with them my wallet and papers. We had abandoned the Ste Marie, and the manager of our new and more luxurious hotel was outraged at my complaint. It would be dangerous to accuse the valet, he said; the law would enable him to collect heavy damages if we complained of him to the police and the charge could not be justified. The police themselves were indifferent and incompetent. After a fortnight we secured fresh passports and left Paris, never to return.

Disintegration, however, was becoming fairly general. I had experienced currency inflation in Germany and Austria, but like most people had regarded the American dollar as dependable. Now, returning from Greece through the quaint and beautiful hill towns of Italy, I found our money shrinking in value. At Rome the American Express Company had rendered a bill I was to pay at Florence. When I did so, a fortnight later, we had gone off the gold standard, and measured in dollars the bill had almost doubled itself. Quitting Paris, I had asked a clerk at the Bankers Trust to figure how many dollars I must draw to exchange for a sufficient number of francs to get me to London. While I was writing the draft, the actress Fannie Ward chatted with me briefly, but when it was cashed and exchanged I had two or three hundred francs too little. I thought the clerk must have made a mistake, but he hadn't; our money had lost that much value during the few minutes of my conversation. The incident was a troublesome reminder of postwar conditions in Vienna and Berlin, and might be a lesson to Americans who, even now, in our Second World War, are telling themselves, "It can't happen here."

In Athens at the Hotel Grand Bretagne, in April 1933, we had another reminder—the old one about the wages of sin. Here we found Samuel Insull, former dictator of a string of utility and holding companies capitalized at about \$4,000,000,000. In the middle twenties Insull's personal fortune had been estimated at \$100,000,000. It is impossible to say how largely he was responsible for the crash that followed; ultimately, the courts found him guiltless of wrongdoing. In 1932, however, he was indicted and fled to Greece,

where we found him a broken and bewildered old man. Occasionally he gave a dinner to Greek officials who were important in his fight against extradition, but most evenings he sat alone in the lobby of the hotel, or went with his wife or the local manager for American Express to see a movie. Even then, Athens at night was a desolate place, and again and again I encountered the ruined millionaire, who had been almost a monarch in Chicago, wandering about dark streets, his head bent and his hands in his emptying pockets. I had been casually acquainted with Mrs. Insull when she was known to the stage as Gladys Wallis, but did not want to presume on that. When at last I addressed her, asking whether she recalled me, she said, "I recognized you the day you arrived, but of course we no longer speak to people until we are spoken to." After that I spent almost every evening with the Insulls. When Insull died of a heart attack in Paris five years later, he had only thirty francs—eighty-four cents—in his pockets.

If I hadn't learned my lesson before, that spring in Greece should have taught me not to judge people by appearances. I thought the lower-class Greeks dirty and inefficient beyond belief, and their more prosperous brothers indifferent and undependable. One or two minor adventures left me sympathetic with the opinion expressed on a placard, "After you have shaken hands with a Greek, count your fingers." At Easter I witnessed a parade of the army, and felt that it might be routed by a squad of our police. A few years later that army had given heroic account of itself against the Italians, and now Greece has entered an era of nobility and heroism comparable to that of its greatest days.

As I have said before, generalizations as to either sex or any race or class are sheer folly. Many of the most generous and hospitable people I have ever known are Scots, and an earlier chapter explains why I do not believe in the alleged stand-offishness of the English. Nevertheless, in Egypt I met the shining example of W. S. Gilbert's Londoner who wouldn't speak to his fellow victim of a shipwreck on a desert island because they'd "never been introduced." Returning from a long day among the Tombs of the Kings near Luxor, I persuaded my daughter to remount her donkey for a moonlight view of Karnak Temple. When we finished the wearisome journey,

I discovered that Helen had forgotten her "monuments ticket," without which she could not enter the enclosure. I tried explanations, but the Arab at the gate could not understand English. Then I tried *backshish*, which is a universal language. Finally I tried threats, and failing again, found that the wall surrounding the temple was full of holes and that a ticket could be passed through one of them. "That Arab can't read," I told Helen. "Use my ticket for yourself, count ten holes to your right, and then return the ticket to me for my entrance."

The maneuver succeeded, and as we were reunited my Englishman arrived with his wife, who had forgotten *her* ticket. The husband tried explanations in vain. Then he tried *backshish*. I attempted to tell him we had just been through his experience, but he merely glared at me, as one who would say, "How dare you?" When he had exhausted threats, I insisted, "I know we haven't met socially, but it's a long ride back to Luxor, and I can save you from it. I pledge my word never to take advantage of this accident, or to speak to you again, but if you'll let me advise you how to get into this place—"

Without even glancing at me, my couple turned their backs and rode seven or eight miles sooner than listen to a stranger who hadn't even a letter presenting him. This man was in the tradition, but *sui generis*, nevertheless. I never met his like again.

Almost all Europeans and Asiatics, however, have a capacity for minding their own business and leaving your morals to you that might be helpful in America. I have written somewhere that an Englishman who doesn't want to play cricket on Sunday simply doesn't play cricket; an American who doesn't want to play baseball on Sunday goes to Washington or Albany with a bill to prevent anyone else playing baseball. The justly celebrated "facts of life" are not only admitted by older civilizations, but given their place in the scheme of things. Anglo-Saxons used to carry their own moral codes abroad, as, with better justification, so many carried their own coffeepots. In a public room aboard a tiny vessel bound for Tunis one night I found a lone pretty girl who, I thought, was being annoyed by a husky Armenian. I was about to intervene, but instead hunted up the officer of the watch.

"Why," he exclaimed, "entertaining gentlemen is that girl's business! She's part of the ship's company!"

In Spain on another occasion I was vexed that only one room in a hotel had been reserved for my daughter and me, and hoping to obtain another, explained, "This lady isn't my wife." The manager merely shrugged his shoulders to suggest that this was my affair, not his. I doubt that this attitude adds greatly to the number of lodgers without a marriage certificate, and it certainly is less insulting than the sign I saw recently in a hotel room in Pennsylvania: "Gentlemen *must* leave their doors open while entertaining ladies." At Trenton some time ago I was stopped when I started for Florence Reed's suite, intending to escort her to a dress rehearsal. "Why," I protested, "I've called on Miss Reed every day this week."

"Yes," the clerk explained; "that's permitted at any time before 8 P.M."

I am still wondering what misbehavior possible after 8 P.M. would have been *impossible* before that hour.

Always I traveled with notebooks and brought them back crowded with material. One of my most successful short stories, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," printed and reprinted in *Liberty*, came from Yucatan, and in books and essays I am still using characters and incidents jotted down all over the world. Having learned how much attention can be distracted by a camera, I collected picture post cards everywhere, filing them carefully to refresh my memory. Everywhere, too, I added to my knowledge of human nature. We met the great and the near-great, as well as everyday folk who were not less interesting. It would be hard to decide whether, aboard the freighter for Yucatan, I was more absorbed by the gigantic Swedish first mate who knocked down two murderous stevedores just before we sailed but was afraid of his tiny blonde wife, or by the agreeable young fellow I took for a salesman, but who proved to be the authority in charge of excavations at Chichen Itzá. To Professor Redfield we owe real instruction in the civilization of the Mayans. On a liner I played shuffleboard every morning with Dr. Lorenz, the famous Austrian surgeon. When I asked the secret of his seemingly eternal youth, the doctor said, "I have known eight

people who lived to be over a hundred, and they had only one thing in common: All of them drank and smoked to excess!"

Late in 1936 we had planned a leisurely trip round the world, with several months in the Orient, when I was offered a lucrative contract for a series of radio broadcasts. My wife thought we should abandon the journey. "We can always see China," she urged, "but you may never get another contract like that." With more than my ordinary foresight I answered, "On the contrary, I can always earn money, but something tells me this is our last chance to see China." In December 1936, therefore, aboard the *Queen Mary*, we sailed for Christmas in London, and then for the long voyage to Bombay. We traveled extensively in India, reaching some conclusions that have no place here, and enjoying an unforgettable week at Agra. There are things no one can describe, and one of them is the Taj Mahal. We saw it by dawn and sunset and moonlight, sitting for hours on the stone benches in the gardens with our eyes fastened upon that perfect façade.

As Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote, "Life is lived in minutes," and I often wonder which minutes will come to mind most vividly in my last years. If I were to list my most thrilling experiences I should certainly set down several with buildings and scenic marvels. Such a list, made quickly, would include falling in love with my wife, my first night at my first play, the Grand Canyon, the Alhambra at Granada, the Temple of Heaven at Peking, the Taj Mahal, and half a dozen mountain peaks among the Himalayas and our own magnificent ranges. I wonder what yours would be.

From India we went to Burma, Malaya, Siam (I prefer the old names to the new) and Indo-China. The ruins of Angkor Wat might go on my list, but to us Cambodia seemed the hottest and most malignant of pest holes. As someone said most unfairly of Texas, if I owned hell and Indo-China I should rent out Indo-China and live in hell. When I wrote something of this sort recently for a magazine, a lady in California sent me an angry protest. I replied, "You were comfortable at Angkor Wat, and I wasn't—so Angkor Wat?" Some of my notes on Malaya are amusing now. Of Penang I wrote, "A green and tranquil paradise; a spot where one might find lasting peace." Singapore was boastful of its defenses and not the least apprehensive of danger from Japan. This imperviousness

was not shared by the Dutch. Almost every intelligent person we met in Java and Borneo regarded the conflict as inevitable. Several of them wondered why we hadn't made another Gibraltar of the Philippines.

For some time I had been warning lecture audiences of a second World War, and any doubt as to its extent was dissipated during this journey. Aboard a small passenger-carrying freighter from Sourabaya to Hong Kong, I found an astonishing book, *Japan Must Fight Britain*, by a Japanese naval officer—a blueprint of much that has happened since. The work had been translated and widely sold. With some pamphlets of the same kind circulated freely in Tokyo I sent copies to responsible leaders at home, receiving, in return, what probably was Form Letter A 69236. Except the Dutch, no one could be roused to the danger. Counting Japanese barber shops at Panama, and amazed at the number, I discussed the matter with an officer of our Army, who said he had reported it frequently, but without result. A high officer of the British navy, who must be nameless, gave me his opinion at Hong Kong that the Japanese could take Singapore in a month and Hong Kong in two weeks. Of course they did rather better than that.

All of us were struck by what seemed to be a new national spirit in China. At Yen Ching University, near Peking, President Stuart told me a survey revealed that a majority of his students were enrolled so they might better serve their country in the crisis to come. From rickshaw boys to college professors, and from Shanghai to Peking, I heard the same distrust and hatred of the Japanese. In Japan itself we sensed rather than saw reason for this. The Japanese were charming to us. When we sailed from Yokohama, aboard the *Tatsuta Maru*, it was amid cheers and hand shakings and showers of paper streamers. But there were those pamphlets, and countless signs of the iron rule of the military caste, and there were Japanese friends in universities who shook their heads sadly when we said, "We'll be back again."

This isn't a travel book, and I must resist the temptation to relate adventures hither and thither and yon. I should like to write of the tin mines at Kuala Lumpur, and the oil tanks of Balikpapan, and of a birthday dinner with newly made friends who flew from all over the Orient to join us at the Raffles Hotel at Singapore. I should like

to tell of my lectures at Shanghai and Honolulu, and of my enthusiasm for Bali and Hawaii, the garden spots of the world. The Balinese and the Chinese seem to me the world's most charming people, and how one could loaf in any of these tropic places! I find a note in one of my books: "March 21, 1937. Recrossed the equator—and that's all I did." On another day I wrote, "Mapped out articles on Bali and the mine owner on train from Kuala Lampur." The first became my "Bali Hooey," and the second prompted the series called "The Most Interesting Character I Ever Met," in the *Reader's Digest*.

In all probability we shall never see any of these places again—certainly not as they were in 1937. Not long after our return the world caught fire. In Shanghai a lovely Chinese girl came often to our rooms in the Cathay Hotel to sell my wife cheap but attractive jewelry. She wore a new red silk dress with a gold dragon on the breast. A delightful young guide who had just become the father of twins showed us their photographs, and was frantic one day because both had sore throats. In the rotogravure section of a newspaper in San Francisco we saw a picture of the girl lying dead in the ruins of her shop. She still wore her red dress. Our guide's home was in Chapei, which had been bombed to dust. I'm afraid that pleasant little fellow will never worry again about the twins with the sore throats.

## SPARE PARTS

THIS is the first autobiography I ever wrote; be kind and lay its faults to that fact. In any unaccustomed task there must be many difficulties, and my worst has been sticking to even a semblance of chronological order. Life has a beginning, a middle and an end, but it is not so easy to decide where all its influences and experiences began or ended. To what chapter does one allocate the history of a play between the conception and the writing of which a quarter of a century intervened, while its effect on the author continues a quarter of a century afterward?

Nearing the conclusion of this book, I find myself more or less amusingly in the plight of the amateur mechanic who took his car to pieces, and when he had put it together again, had dozens of parts left over. Among my dozens—or, rather, hundreds—are several whose inclusion was specifically promised in earlier chapters, and, more especially, the names of dozens, or hundreds, of interesting people with whom I have come in contact. Allocating *them* has been the greatest difficulty of all; in what chapter of life did a friendship become of its utmost importance? Striving for continuity and pace in describing an event, how shall one pause for comment on the personalities connected with it?

To repeat myself, I have been rich in friendship with bishops and burglars, capitalists and chorus girls. As there have been scores of the only woman I ever loved, there have been as many of the best friend I ever had. *All* my best friendships have lasted until death did us part, and the only three people who disappointed me were not friends but chance acquaintances or business associates. Even these, I can understand. A stranger to whom I sent a large sum



because he was ill of tuberculosis, and whom I have never seen since, recently spoke of me so maliciously that his companions at dinner in a club rose and left the table. That sort of thing has happened to most of us, and it has no significance that would baffle any good psychologist.

As in the case of Basil King, many of my strongest friendships were made in five minutes. One of the finest men I ever met was Herbert Shipman, Suffragan Bishop of New York. Herbert sat across the board from me at a clerical luncheon, and before we parted, asked me to dine with him that night. I accepted the invitation gladly, and then had to telephone another guest at the luncheon to learn with whom I was dining. Bishop Shipman was a practicing Christian, simple, and greatly human. With a thousand such men the world could be won to goodness and Christianity. Once in his sister's home we discussed the curious things of which people are proud—as for example, I have known them to be proud of bad temper. Herbert said *he* was proud of only one possession, and then refused to describe it. Later I learned that this was a letter written to him when, during the First World War, he was invalided home from France. Expressive of deep affection, it was signed by every man in the regiment.

While I was ill and depressed, watching the death throes of my play, *Mr. Moneybags*, Shipman “just happened to drop in” at my office every afternoon. There the Episcopal Suffragan Bishop of New York sat on my desk, swinging his legs, uttering no pieties, but warming me with his affection. Our last meeting was one of those experiences it is hard to explain by natural laws. Herbert had been abroad, we had not seen each other for months, and both of us were feverishly occupied. In my desk card box I had a memo, “*Must* make an appointment with Shipman,” but whenever I reached it I thought, “Too busy today,” and placed the memo with those for the following week. One morning as I was thinking, “Too busy today,” a voice on the wire said, “*This* is the Synod House,” and I realized that, without knowing it, I had telephoned Shipman. “Let’s lunch today,” he said.

“I have another luncheon appointment.”

“So have I,” Herbert declared, “but *we’ll* lunch at one o’clock at the Union Club.”

The luncheon lasted four hours. For some unexplained reason we discussed death, and Shipman, who had written the class song for the Military Academy, told me he wanted to be buried at West Point. Afterward, as he was driving me home, we discovered that he had taken an unlocked car belonging to someone else, and we laughed at the prospect of being apprehended before he could return it. At my door we exchanged far more than ordinarily fond farewells, and the next day Herbert fell dead at his own luncheon table. But for that unconscious telephone call, I should never have seen him again.

I was a pallbearer at Shipman's funeral services in the Cathedral of St. John, and later learned that he had expressed the wish for a far less elaborate service in the little church of St. Paul's at Eastchester. As he had requested I conducted this service; Richard Harrison, the Negro who had played De Lawd in *The Green Pastures* read a poem, and "Pete" Weigle, who presides at St. Paul's, led in prayer. *The Green Pastures* might never have been produced but for Shipman. Harrison, who was almost essential to it, refused to appear in the play because he thought it sacrilegious until Herbert persuaded him to the contrary.

One of Shipman's graces, a quick sense of humor, was shared by another Bishop—a Methodist, at that—my friend G. Bromley Oxnam. Delighted at an unexpected encounter in Wichita, Kansas, and forgetting his new clerical dignity, I exclaimed, "My God, I'm glad to see you!"

"In view of my recent elevation," Dr. Oxnam laughed, "shouldn't you have said, 'My Lord'?"

As I was hesitating over repeating this story, conscious now of the aforesaid dignity, I had this note from Oxnam: "I owe you some money. Inadvertently, you provided me with a splendid introduction for lectures. You may recall that at Wichita, etc. G.B.O."

For the reasons I've given, a story like that is a "splendid introduction for lectures." The best of my own experience followed a chance meeting with the comedian, James T. Powers, whom I hadn't seen in a dozen years. "Have you five minutes?" Jimmie asked. "I'd like you to meet my wife. No one else admires you so much. She reads every line you write, and she once traveled 150

miles to hear you speak." Then he took me to Mrs. Powers and said, "Darling, I want you to know Heywood Broun."

The first act of *Roads of Destiny* was laid in a gambling house in Alaska, and required a crooked roulette wheel. As I had never seen one I combed my list of acquaintances for somebody who might understand their workings. After Tex Rickard and Bat Masterson had failed me, Will Irwin introduced me to Bert Stafford, who had given him the material for his book, *The Confessions of a Con Man*. Bert proved to be a mild, blue-eyed little fellow, with graying hair, who looked like a prosperous granger. He had begun his career as "fixer" for a circus, when his job was to grease the palms of authorities in preparation for the coming of a host of three-card monte swindlers and the proprietors of shell games. When, much later, I suggested to Bert the wisdom of "going straight," he countered, "What do you mean, 'straight'? I'm as honest as anybody. Don't forget that I've met hundreds of mayors and chiefs of police, and never one who couldn't be squared!"

Stafford had never enjoyed himself as he did at our rehearsals. Under his supervision we built a roulette wheel that could be stopped instantly by laying a pile of chips on a button concealed beneath the green cloth. Then Bert had so much fun instructing the cast in its use that until late afternoon we never got to any other scene in the play. He refused to be paid for this service, but years later he woke me in the middle of the night to say that he had to have \$200, cash and quick. "Don't ask me why," he remarked, "or you'll be an accessory after the fact. I'll return the money to you if and when I can." It came back to me a week afterward from Havana—in sharp contrast with the behavior of my respectable tubercular acquaintance who never returned a penny, but abused me roundly whenever he had the opportunity.

Bert, however, made no secret of his crookedness. His partner and he had been in Chicago, penniless, when gold was discovered in the Yukon. "There was thousands of suckers on their way," he related, "and we didn't have the money to go. But the next day we fell in with a drover from upstate, so we started that night. We spent the fall at the entrance to Dead Horse Pass, doing God's work."

"God's work!" I exclaimed.

"Sure," Bert answered, with twinkling eyes. "A lot of tender-feet would have died on the trail that winter. We broke 'em, and they had to go home. Ain't that God's work?"

Bert was devoted to his wife, Betty, and used to appear with his pockets full of cookies she had baked for me. When we entered the First World War, he called one afternoon and proudly told me he was with the United States Secret Service. "I'm attached to the North Atlantic Squadron," he said, showing his credentials. "I know every crooked gambler and tart in the world. It's my job to spot 'em and get 'em out of town before the gobs go ashore. And"—beaming—"don't you think any guy in the trenches is taking a bigger chance with his life than I am!" The last time I saw Bert was in Los Angeles, a few years ago, when he had fallen on very hard times.

As for chorus girls, I have known hundreds, of course, and each with a history that would bear telling. They are mostly a decent and hard-working tribe, and this would include many of whom you would think it unlikely. One of the cigarette-and-whisky-voiced night-club "hoofers" we engaged for *Mr. Moneypenny* spent every cent of her salary on a mother dying of cancer, and gave her every hour out of the theater. "I just can't afford it," she replied to my suggestion that she take a week off, and when I assured her that there would be no break in her income, she turned her back on me without a word—but has sent me greetings at Christmas every year since then. Another girl, of whom many scandalous tales were told, married an actor appearing in one of my plays, and when he succumbed to a heart affection became cook, nurse and wage-earner for her husband, and has continued to be so for a quarter of a century.

Kay Laurell, the great beauty of the *Ziegfeld Follies*, afterward shared the lot of a very close friend of mine who, at the moment, was having the worst of two very unhappy matrimonial experiences. He is an elderly man now, but recently he told me, truly, "I married two women with all the domestic virtues, but the woman I didn't marry was the best wife I ever had." I mention this, not in defense of loose living, but as proof of my contention that none of us has a monopoly on vice or virtue. I saw a great deal of Kay

during those years, and admired her more and more. She was ambitious to be an actress, and finally secured the leading role in a road company playing a melodrama called *Whispering Wires*. My wife and I witnessed the performance in Chicago, and Kay sent an usher to beg us to go to her dressing room. "How bad was I?" she asked. "I want the truth." She was working like a Trojan. Among other things, "Every day," she told us, "I stride up and down for an hour with a book on my head to get rid of that Follies Walk." Kay could have gone far if she had been willing to exchange her favors for advancement, but she didn't "want to get ahead that way." When she failed to get ahead any other way, she retired, brokenhearted, to London or Paris, where she died in the full bloom of a beauty that Howard Chandler Christy thought had never been equaled on our stage.

At some time in the future I should write a book about Texas Guinan, the exuberant night-club hostess who, when she was a chorus girl, lived under the same roof with Will Rogers and me at the St. Francis Hotel. I didn't see Tex again for years afterward, or until one evening when I acted as toastmaster at a dinner in honor of Daniel Frohman. D. F., the most selfless of men, had accepted the tribute on condition that the proceeds should go to the Actors' Fund, and Texas had contributed \$5,000 and the floor show from her night club. However, when she took her place at the guest table three or four self-righteous ladies rose and departed. William Lyon Phelps, who sat at my left, suggested we might put a stop to this silly and insulting behavior if we made a great fuss over Miss Guinan. Accordingly, I kissed her, for the first and last time, and presented Phelps. Making conversation, Billy told Tex, "I had no idea you knew Channing."

"Know him!" Tex exclaimed. "Hell, I went through my first husband with him!"

Texas never mentioned our chat with her at this dinner, but I suspect her sharp eyes had taken in what was happening, and her sharper mind the reason for our warmth. When *The House Beautiful* opened in New York, I hand-picked my first-night audience, as usual, and Crosby Gaige and I were disturbed when we found that Texas had contrived to obtain seats. "She'll hate the play," Gaige groaned, "and she'll say so to everyone in the lobby." As a

matter of fact, no one else ever loved the piece as did this night-club hostess. For weeks she devoted herself to helping win its success, and at the end of that time, seeing several copies of the printed play on my desk, she asked whether she might have one with an inscription. I penned this in haste and after Tex's death was astonished at reading in a newspaper that among her effects sold at auction was a volume of *The House Beautiful*, inscribed by the author, "To Tex, in undying memory of her favors."

My wife insists that if I could be "compromised," Texas Guinan would have done the trick that season. She practically lived in my office, and when she went abroad, insisted that I give her a letter to the proprietor of our little hotel in Paris. Tex was deported on the ground that she intended earning money in France, which was then forbidden to aliens, and the Associated Press reported her disclaimer: "I am here as the guest of my dear friend, Channing Pollock, and merely expected to spend a few weeks with him in his chateau." Tex, of course, had no idea that this statement might be damaging. There is no doubt in my mind that, throughout, she meant only to show her gratitude for what Billy Phelps and I did at the dinner to Daniel Frohman.

My friendship with D. F. lasted forty years, and ended, temporarily, when I delivered the eulogy at his funeral in December 1940. In addition, he had known my wife in her childhood, when her father, Edward Marble, was his stage director at the Madison Square Theater. As I suppose most people know, even in this age of short memories, Daniel Frohman had been among our foremost managers, and I have referred to his famous stock company at the old Lyceum. Much later he was one of the founders of the Famous Players' Film Company, and built and managed the new Lyceum, in West Forty-fifth Street. Under the roof of that structure he furnished for himself a "studio" containing one of the richest collections of theatrical souvenirs in the world. Many of these he bequeathed to the Museum of the City of New York. I have lunched and dined scores of times in this "studio," either alone with D. F., or in some brilliant company. The luncheons alone together were rather curious. Dan never ate lunch; there would be no place set but mine, but D. F. would sit beside me, smoking and talking.

After dinner we usually saw the play through an aperture in the wall that afforded a clear view of the stage.

More than fifty years before his death at eighty-nine, D. F. founded and became lifetime president of the Actors' Fund of America, which provides for elderly and impoverished players, and, I think, is among the best-managed of all charities. With the passage of time Dan's other interests lapsed, and he worked only for the Fund. And how he did work! Old, growing feeble and more than half blind, Frohman's days and nights were given to luncheons, dinners and receptions designed to enlist possible benefactors, and to organizing benefits. Money and honors had ceased to concern him. The Lyceum was proving so constant a drain that one night in a taxi he offered to let me have the theater without payment to him, and then added, "No, I like you too much." When the Fund unveiled the perfect bronze bust of him made by Florence Darnault, and I spoke, D. F. whispered to me, "Cut it short. Nobody wants to hear my praises sung, and heaven knows, I don't!" In his last years, Dan's only close friends, perhaps, were myself and the novelist, Fannie Hurst, whose devotion to him entitles her to a chair near the Throne.

After seventy D. F. grew leaner and straighter and ever more remarkable in appearance. His eyes, which finally failed him, were becoming dim and watery, and his sparse beard seemed never to have been trimmed. Because of indifference, partial blindness or poverty, his clothing was shabby and usually spotted. He became virtually helpless, but wouldn't admit it. When he dined with us, we had to invent excuses for accompanying him home. Walking alone one night, he had fallen down the subway stairs and injured himself seriously. His fine mind, stored with the world's best literature and with reminiscences of the world's great, became a sort of phonograph record that could only give voice to sentences framed long ago. At a luncheon he spoke not a word to his neighbor, Helen Hayes, until I happened to mention an actress who had been dead half a century. Then, as though the needle had been placed on the record, D. F. talked of her for an hour, saying nothing, however, that I had not heard him say dozens of times. Occasionally there would be a curious flash of light. Waking from a nap after dinner in my apartment, suddenly "Uncle Dan" quoted, "It

is not at death that death is death, but before death." That was the first time I had ever heard him allude to death—a subject forbidden in his presence. I never heard him say an unpleasant word about anybody, and one of his last acts, perhaps, was taking a crumpled bill from his almost empty pocket and asking me to see that it reached an inmate of an Actors' Fund Home who wanted some trifle not provided there.

Frohman's associations had given him an inexhaustible fund of anecdote. I recall several capital yarns he told me of J. M. Barrie, and especially one relating to the Scotch thrift of the author of *Peter Pan*. Barrie's plain little secretary had typed the manuscript of this play, and Charles Frohman had offered her two orchestra seats for the first night in London. The girl said she had no dress fit for wear in the stalls on such an occasion. Touched, C. F. repeated her remark to Sir James, meaning to propose that they supply the deficiency. Barrie was touched, too. "Oh, that's pathetic," he exclaimed, "but we'll fix it, Charlie! We'll give her seats in the gallery!"

David Belasco, whose earliest plays, written in collaboration with the father of William and Cecil De Mille, had been produced by Daniel Frohman, was a puzzling combination of genius and charlatan. There is reason for doubting that Belasco ever had an original idea in his life, but he was a wizard with other people's ideas—the greatest stage director and master of dramatic structure in his time. Much of the vaunted realism of *our* time, especially in physical details, may be credited to him. This often ran to absurdity. Sitting in the first row at one of his productions, I observed that a letter read by one of the characters had printed on it the initials of the supposed correspondent!

"Mr. Dave," as most of his people called him, always wore clerical garb, though heaven only knew why. He had large soft eyes and one of the softest voices I ever heard. His surroundings and almost every word and act were planned for theatrical effect. Belasco's office, or study, atop his theater in Forty-fourth Street, was a museum and a stage set to lend interest and importance to its chief occupant. One afternoon when he was to be interviewed by a lady reporter, I found him painstakingly pinning on a screen before his desk hundreds of notes for the play he was writing. The screen



may have been a useful device, but it was gone the next day, and I never saw it again. "Mr. Dave" rejected four of my works, always with some kindly subterfuge. These sometimes were so flattering as to be humorous. "I'd like to produce this piece," he once told me, "but I don't know when I could get around to it. If you were an ordinary author I'd simply hold it until I was ready, but of course I couldn't do that with people like you and Pinero." I came to know this formula so well that when Belasco sent for me to discuss *The Fool*, before leaving home I wrote and showed my wife what I expected him to say. After he'd said it, I laid in his hand the paper bearing the words he had just uttered. "Mr. Dave" wasn't offended; he merely smiled wistfully and remarked, "You see, you understood the situation as well as I do."

After Belasco had produced his comedy, *Nobody's Widow*, Avery Hopwood, by then a dramatist of large experience, told me he had never seen another director of equal patience, skill and resourcefulness. "D. B.," he said, had devoted three hours to one speech, in which Bruce McRae, who had asked Blanche Bates, "What are you going to do?" is answered, "Do? Marry you—damn you!" At the end of this time Miss Bates was hysterical but otherwise perfect. Jane Cowl offered to show me bruises all over her arms and shoulders inflicted in the course of Belasco's stage direction. Hopwood himself never directed his own plays, but was exceedingly quick at seeing possibilities and suggesting them. It is an interesting reflection that, with two or three notable exceptions, our best stage directors have been at least slightly effeminate. Apparently this art has something in common with those of the modiste and the interior decorator.

I have said that Hopwood was ruined by his success. He was a charming boy when I met him, and he remained a charming boy throughout his forty-four years. After his first quick triumph, however, his follies and weaknesses became notorious. A New York newspaper devoted an entire page to one escapade. In 1928 Avery appeared at my flat in Ninety-eighth Street to announce his departure for Europe. He had been drinking, but stayed for dinner and afterward followed me to my study. "I'm sailing tomorrow," he said, "and I'm never coming back."

"You intend living abroad?"

"I don't intend living anywhere," Avery blurted. "I'm sick of it!"

I advised him not to be a damned fool. "You've got everything a man could want."

"Yes," Hopwood answered, very calmly, "I've got everything," and he recited a list of tragic habits and maladies that left me speechless. "Now," he added, "I want to leave you a power of attorney, and I'll dictate it to you at the typewriter."

I protested, of course. Hopwood had a very large fortune, and it was absurd that I should be in control of it. He insisted, nevertheless, and signed the document, which I destroyed as soon as I found that his will was properly drawn and named his executors. Avery went almost directly to St. Jean de Luz, where, on July 1, he ate a heavy meal and then immediately plunged into the sea and was drowned. The larger part of his fortune was bequeathed to his mother, who, when *she* died, left a considerable part of it in trust for a pet monkey. Thus I cannot be sure that Avery's weaknesses were *all* the results of quick success.

The number of "spare parts" I find on my desk and in my memory would almost suffice for building another motorcar—otherwise, writing another book. However greatly this one may have tried your patience, you have no idea how much I have left out that I wanted to include. I have known so many interesting people—a hastily made list of those I *most* wanted to include contains nearly two hundred names—and of nearly all of them I recall amusing and illustrative anecdotes. How is one to skip friends like Artur Bodanzky, so long Wagnerian conductor at the Metropolitan, or to dismiss with a few words such others as George Cohan and Rita Weiman, the loveliest and most ingenious of authors, and Dr. Ross McPherson and George Tyler, that remarkable man and manager? My long association with Roy Howard began when he was an underpaid reporter, and I advised the girl who became his wife not to marry him unless she was reconciled to a lifetime on short rations. In view of the fact that, soon afterward, Roy became owner of the Scripps-Howard Newspapers, that is an additional example of my failure as a prophet. I should like to speak tenderly of friends like Morton Meinhard, with whom I hobnobbed all over

the world, and who died in Japan, and of his wife, Carrie Meinhard, who is another of the only women I ever loved. To my regret, this is an autobiography, not a five-volume *Who's Who* with reminiscences of everybody mentioned. I must confine myself now to stories I have promised to relate, and to not more than one or two others that tempt me beyond resistance. There are fifty I long to tell of Victor Herbert. Victor was a great composer; it is too bad not to devote a chapter to him.

He was certainly the most companionable of men—as unlike the popular idea of a musician as my wife is unlike the popular idea of a woman of the theater. A deep devotion to beer had given him the girth of an expectant mother. He was tall, too, and had an enormous head and shoulders. Victor's conception of a perfect afternoon or evening was to gather three or four cronies about a table in the rear of a restaurant. His ancestry was German and Irish—he was a grandson of the novelist, Samuel Lover—but the Irish predominated in Victor. He could tell a story superlatively well and enjoy it as much as his listeners. Victor's only complaint of America was that there wasn't enough "fair weather when good fellows get together." "In Europe," he said, "every artist spends part of almost every evening discussing his work with other artists. Here, if you repeat one of your stories to fellow craftsmen, or I one of my tunes, they are bored to extinction. There should be no pardons asked for shoptalk. If a man isn't more interested in his shop than in anything else he has no business to have a shop."

When Victor planned his residence in 108th Street, he spent a small fortune on a soundproof room in which to work. The room was directly under the roof, windowless and what is now known as air-conditioned. A week after he took possession Victor joined me for luncheon in Browne's Chop House with a face like a thundercloud. "This room cost me at least \$20,000," he growled, "and the only outlet is a ventilator at the top of the wall. That ventilator is level with the next roof, where every day a damned scoundrel sits for hours practicing on a saxophone. I should have more quiet in a boiler factory!" Suddenly he threw back his head, shaking with laughter. "\$20,000 for a saxophone concert!" he roared. "Did you ever hear anything as funny as that?"

I promised to tell you why my acquaintance with Mrs. Fay,

the clairvoyant and mind reader, gave me new understanding of human credulity, but I must make that short. When the lady was at Hammerstein's Victoria, in a spirit of scientific inquiry I gave her a good deal of information. If an author told me, for example, that he had just sold a short story, and received a check for \$1,000, I soon asked whether he had witnessed Mrs. Fay's performance, obtained tickets for him, and then passed on the news to Mrs. Fay, together with the location of his seats. In a dozen repetitions of this experiment, *not one* of my human guinea pigs confined himself to the truth in relating his experience. He was sure to add, "And she said my check was dated October 10, and numbered 94,606"—which was impossible, as, not knowing these facts, I could not impart them. Everyone had to make the story a little more amazing, and to this tendency I attribute much of our faith in the supernatural.

One more tale of Mrs. Fay: "In Providence, Rhode Island," she told me, "they think I'm a witch. The manager of the theater there owned some land whose value was decreased by two neighboring gas tanks, and he had exhausted legal efforts to have these removed. He thought he might frighten the gas company. 'If I have someone ask you whether you predict a disaster in Providence,' he said, 'will you reply that you see two new gas tanks exploding, with considerable loss of life?' I did so, and when I reached the street after the matinee I found newsboys crying extras. Fifteen minutes after my prophecy, those tanks had blown up and killed or injured seven people."

My last visit to Augustus Thomas, so long our foremost dramatist, was recorded in a short story, "The Has-Been," published in *Liberty*. Thomas, who had been ill, turned up at a matinee of *The House Beautiful*, and begged me to dine with him. When I reached New Rochelle, I had forgotten where he lived, and apparently everyone else had forgotten that he ever lived. A girl in a public library, standing beneath a shelf loaded with his plays, murmured, "Augustus Thomas? I never heard of him." When, finally remembering my way, I reached the house, I found it in a square named after my friend—Thomas Place. The residence was in bad repair; Gus had fallen on evil days, and the road from the gate was covered with weeds—no one had driven up to that house in months. We

dined with his wife, Lisle Thomas, and then sat in Gus' study, where marks on the wallpaper showed where the fine paintings I recalled had hung. Nothing much was left except framed letters beginning "Dear Gus," and signed by Theodore Roosevelt while he was President, Leopold, King of the Belgians, and other world figures. When I left, this wit and author, who had been famous on two continents and whom I had regarded with speechless awe thirty-five years before in Washington, asked wistfully, "Will you come again soon? We almost never see anyone these days."

The most interesting man I ever knew, and excepting my wife and daughter, the best friend I ever had, was my father's brother, to whom I have alluded as Uncle Fred. Fred had been the despair of his family, graduating from one university after another—Prague, Leipzig, Heidelberg—and manifesting no interest in other employment. He was the best informed and most truly educated person I ever encountered—equally versed in and equally eloquent as to chemistry, engineering, astronomy, history, archaeology, the literature of ancient Greece and modern Russia. Like my father he spoke and read half a dozen languages, and his gifts as a teacher were remarkable. Once after I had wasted two hours trying to explain to my wife "what makes a locomotive go," Fred made it clear to her in five minutes. My private opinion is that anyone who can make my wife even *care* how *anything* works is a great genius.

At twenty-five Fred was still being graduated from universities, but had a summer job in Prague that paid him the equivalent of \$20 a week. Then he boarded a steamer to say farewell to us at Bremerhaven, and when he went back on deck the vessel was miles out in the North Sea. Fred had to come to America, bemoaning his lost \$20 a week, and very shortly after was earning \$10,000 a year as one of the chief engineers of Union Pacific. His kind of training was rare in the United States of those days, and he had brought it to the best possible market. By middle age he had become successively chief engineer, manager of operations, and vice president of United States Smelting.

Fred never married, and before he was seventy he made the mistake of retiring. After that, except when he was with my wife and daughter and myself, he was lonely and wretched. He had ex-

pected to fall back upon his great interest in archaeology, but hated traveling without congenial company, and was forever urging us to be his guests in Egypt or other parts of the Near East. "Why won't you go?" he would ask.

"Too busy."

"I'll see you're nothing out of pocket."

"It isn't a matter of money."

"Confound all busy men!" Fred would exclaim with feeling. Once idle himself, he couldn't understand the preoccupation of others. He would leave Shoreham for a fortnight with old friends in Boston, who had been his fellow directors of United States Smelting, and return next day, hurt to the soul. "They've no time for me."

"If the situation were reversed, and, with nothing better to do, they'd called at *your* office when you were busy, you'd have had no time for *them*."

Fred merely mourned.

Together, when I was free, he and my wife and daughter and I wandered over the world, and in Port Said I asked Fred to leave me out of his will and divide his intended bequest to me between my brother and sister. "They have more need of the money," I said, "and our relations have been too nearly perfect to be marred by financial considerations." Fred sulked a few days and then saw the wisdom of my suggestion. No other man of my acquaintance had so many associates who remembered him only when they wanted something, and my uncle knew it and was growing bitter. After a particularly flagrant instance, one night he complained to my daughter, "I'm only the cow that gives the milk."

At Shoreham every morning my uncle fed the birds. There might not be one in sight when he closed the screen door after him and appeared with his tray of crumbs, but two minutes later the lawn would be covered with birds. They would perch on his shoulders and on the tray itself. Fred read while I worked, and evenings we played dominoes or discussed philosophy and government. "The only reason I dread death," he said often, "is that I dislike departing with so much still unread."

When the end came, in 1938, Fred's bankers delivered to me a letter of instructions. His body was to be cremated, there were to

be no services, and no one was to attend except my wife and daughter and myself. "Otherwise, I want no one at my funeral," he wrote, "and I should like my ashes strewn over the lawn at Shoreham, where I have been happiest."

One morning the following spring I carried out this final request. As I closed the screen door after me and appeared with the tray bearing my uncle's ashes, hundreds of birds flew down to the lawn and perched on my shoulders. Fred had wanted no one at his funeral, but these friends came, nevertheless, and I think he would have been glad.

## THREE SCORE AND SO WHAT?

FOR the duration, there is a beach patrol at Shoreham, as everywhere on our coast, and recently I complained to one of the soldiers that a severe cold had cost me an afternoon's sport. "A lost day is almost the only thing one can never get back," I said, "and at sixty-two I haven't so many to lose. I shan't be playing tennis after another eight or ten years."

"Oh, yes, you will," the soldier replied, "but I'll be able to beat you then!"

In my heart of hearts I doubt it. Except, I hope, for some increase of knowledge and experience, the passing years have touched me lightly—and I have been almost unaware of them. To an idle traveler, a journey must seem long, but if one has been occupied one is startled at reaching his destination, as I am astonished now at finding myself past middle age. Not long ago a lad in town stepped on my toes, and when I glared at him asked, "What's the matter, Pop?" That puzzled me for hours afterward. Why should anyone address a young fellow like myself in that manner?

"There's no trick to growing old," Edgar Guest said; "anyone can do it who has time enough." I never had time, and haven't now. My days are a pleasant and crowded routine. I wake at sunrise, and in summer, after some work in the garden and a swim, begin writing at eight. Except during fifteen minutes for a light luncheon, I go on writing until three, and then, dictating rapidly, attend to a correspondence that averages a hundred letters a day. Strangers write me from all over the world—communications so full of human interest that only pressure prevents my answering them at length. From four o'clock until after six I paddle a canoe and play tennis and swim, after which we enjoy cocktails and din-



ner and a rubber of cribbage. At nine I am in bed with a book and a note pad, and by eleven-thirty the household is asleep. In New York the schedule substitutes a walk for my afternoon on the beach, and, occasionally, dinner out or a visit to the theater takes the place of cribbage and reading. On a lecture tour, of course, everything is quite different.

Until recently, in town I spent part of every afternoon in the gymnasium run by my friend, "Philadelphia Jack" O'Brien. At sixty I found that a little too strenuous. One day I dislocated my jaw while boxing, and when I explained matters to my physician he looked at me in disgust and asked, "Why don't you act your age?" I have pondered that question, and don't know the answer. However, I am unwilling to do anything that will subtract from the time left to me, which, I think, should be not less than twenty years. As a matter of fact I have my work mapped out for most of that period, and shall be deeply disappointed if it is cut short. A few nights ago, retiring with my mind full of plans, I thought, "Shouldn't I be surprised if I failed to waken tomorrow, and all these things were left undone!"

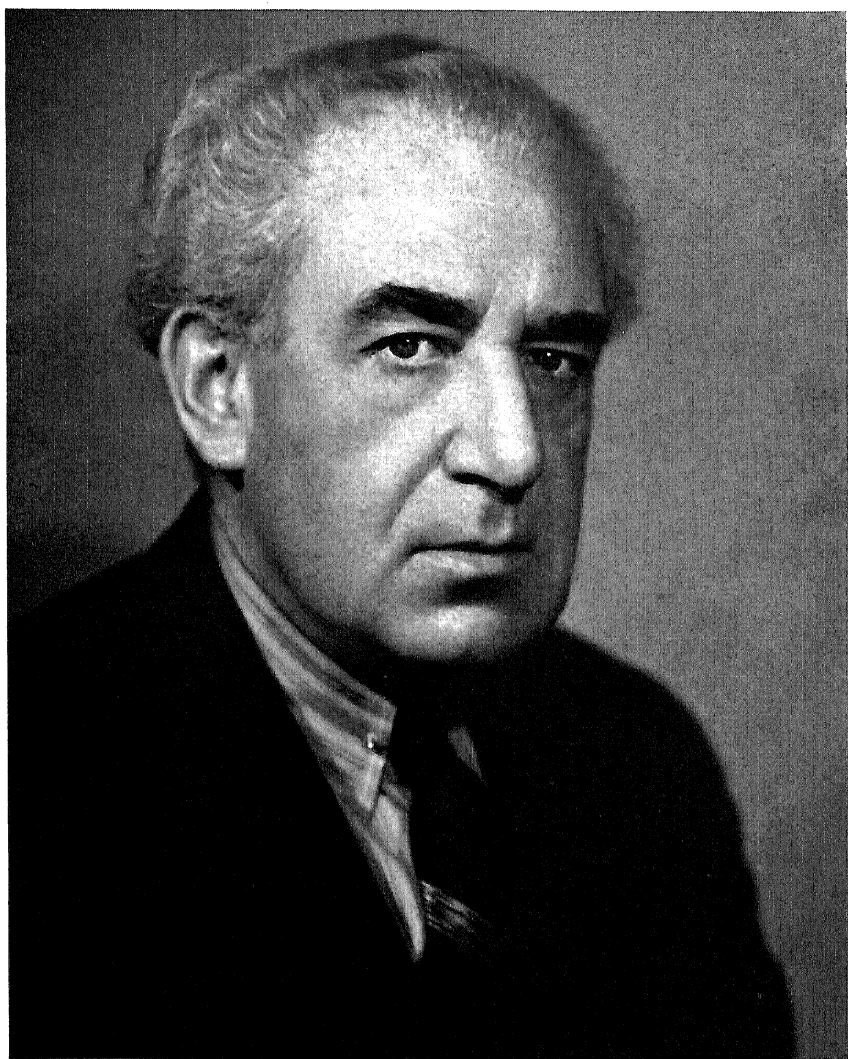
I have complete and sympathetic understanding of a Polish workman who lived in Shoreham. Reaching seventy, he gave his age as reason for quitting his job. "Why, John," his employer said, "I thought you the kind of man who dies with his boots on."

John flushed and reconsidered.

Shortly after his passing in the hospital at Port Jefferson, his son told this former employer that John's mind was not right at the end. "Ten minutes before that," the boy related, "father pressed his push button and went on pressing until the nurse came. Then he cried, 'Quick, nurse; I want my boots on!' and died wearing them."

I hope to die with my boots on, and not before 1965.

In the first place, I have had and am having the happiest of lives. Good and bad alike—and there hasn't been much bad—I can say honestly that I have enjoyed every moment. There are things I would change, or *think* I would change, if I "had it to do over again"; many of them are recorded in this book, but, as I have written, too, I cannot be sure that I *should* do them differently, or be better off if I had done so. How *could* I be better off? I have health, love of my work, a charming home, friends, and the best



"THREE SCORE AND SO WHAT?"

My latest photograph.



The author takes his ease at Shoreham.

wife and daughter possible. No one, I think, is *worse* off for my having been in the world. Very, very truly, if a fairy offered me three wishes I could use only one of them: "I wish to keep all the blessings I now enjoy."

In the second place, though, as Rennold Wolf said, this is a "bum generation," it is also one of the most exciting periods of history. We are fighting for everything that has made life agreeable, and our nation great, and I don't mean only the fight against the Germans and the Japanese. Individual liberty is threatened on other battlefronts, and, I think, we may be victorious abroad and still find ourselves existing only for the State, instead of part of the old State that existed only for its citizens. To me, that would be unendurable. Nevertheless, I should not want to die without knowing the outcome of our present struggle. If we are defeated in the fight at home, there is always a way out, and if Hitler or Hirohito defeats us, they will find the way for me promptly. I am assured that Hitler has records of everything said or written about him, and if that is true, and he conquers us, I shall be shot at sunrise, or, perhaps, without waiting for sunrise.

Meanwhile, it seems to me there is more work to be done than ever before. There are established truths which we cannot afford to have forgotten, and there are old and new torches to be lit and carried on. In the Founder's Night Address I delivered for the Players' Club as 1940 was becoming 1941, I referred to the monastery described in James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, in which were kept not only the finest material fruits of culture—books, pictures and music—but culture itself, the standards of civilized living. The High Lama spoke of "the coming storm that will rage till every flower of culture is trampled, and all human things are leveled in a vast chaos." Then he said, "I see, at a great distance, a new world stirring in the ruins . . . seeking its lost and legendary treasures. And they will all be here, my son."

"What the High Lama had in mind," I remarked, "was the ruin brought about by invading barbarians, by rage and by improvement in the technique of destruction. But the vulgarizing of life, the annihilation of standards, had been going on apace long before the current catastrophe—may, indeed, have had a part in making it pos-

sible. We move and have our being amid childish gadgets, comic strips, film-fan magazines, impressionistic art, free verse, jazz, jitter-bugs, bingo addicts, live-goldfish eaters, night clubbers, dinner dancers and boogie-woogie players. . . . We must have an altar for the eternal flame of our memories and traditions where we can preserve the opinions of reasonable men against iron and steel; keeping our torch alight through the coming Dark Ages, and seeking such wisdom as we shall need when our passions are spent." To this task, I think, every one of us trained in the use of voice or pen may well devote what remains of his allotted span.

When my book *The Adventures of a Happy Man* was published, a reporter asked me, "How can you be happy with what is going on in the world?" Every intelligent person must be deeply disturbed by this, but why should an intelligent person be unhappy because he is disturbed? I can understand a pig's being unhappy at being disturbed in his sty, but for cerebral humans disturbance should be a challenge and an opportunity. Without such clarion calls to action, without struggle, people and nations grow smug and soft, as we have been doing until now, and after the war may do even more disastrously if the government fulfills its promise to protect us from the consequences of our own failings and follies. Of this I am so certain that few things have given me more concern than a provision in my will. Remembering my early fight for existence, the handicap of insufficient education, and the long period during which I had to delay doing the work I wanted to do until I had earned money enough to risk it, I have bequeathed the house at Shoreham and a trust fund to other authors in the same situation.

Now, in maturity, I ask myself: Is this wise? Has the best writing been done by men with their necessities supplied, men wrapped in cotton wool, or by those who knew the struggle for existence? Does Chatterton live in an attic because he is a poet, or is he a poet because he lives in an attic? Should we have had the works of Charles Dickens if he had been spared poverty, close contact with people, and the imprisonment of his mother and father? My own most ambitious efforts *were* delayed by my struggle for existence, and suffered from it, but would they have been possible without the struggle? Again, I reflect "the fault is not in our stars." Living has persuaded me that what we call luck plays a very small part in life—

or, at least, in those experiences which are subject to our own effort and ability. It was luck that I was spared contact with the high-tension wire at Shoreham, and that I won at roulette at Monte Carlo, but chance is less important in proportion as skill enters into a game, and that includes the game of our living. As I tried to demonstrate in my play, destiny is character, and only a very poor quality of character deteriorates rather than improves under stress. This is not a popular doctrine, of course, since it destroys those comforting "alibis" and leaves us face to face with ourselves, but it seems to me the only sound and courageous conclusion. Any other, I think, is like cheating at solitaire.

"What is going on in the world," brought about by forces greater than ourselves, requires these comprehensions. No one can be insensible to the suffering, the death, danger and destruction abroad, nor to that which threatens at home. To be "unhappy" about it is another matter. Angry, yes, and embattled. We must realize, however, that, if these are "forces greater than ourselves," they are not necessarily forces beyond our control. To be merely "unhappy" and supine is no way out. For millions of us, death has become the easier of two alternatives, and those of us who do not die must fight, and win, and come through into a happier world. The question is only Hamlet's, whether to suffer outrageous fortune "or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them."

True autobiography must be an account of what a man *thinks*, even more than of what he *does*, and as that life comes to nothing which has not influenced thought, so it seems to me that every record of living should end with the conclusions that were the result of living. Hence this contemplative last chapter, and these reflections on world affairs in relation to the individual—in this case myself. No one can set down on paper the events of his life without promptings to inquiry as to their cause and effect, and no reader, I hope, can reach the end of that paper without the same promptings. If you are an exception, my advice as to this chapter is "skip it."

If, as is true, I have never been unhappy a whole hour, how is that to be explained? First, I suppose, comes "a happy disposition," largely the result of excellent health, which in turn has been the result of moderation and a wise selection of ancestors. Being will-

ing to admit that "luck" may be—say—five per cent of life, I confess to good fortune in forebears who were close to the soil, and behaved themselves at least moderately well. For a very large share of my happiness my wife and daughter are responsible, and they *were* largely "luck." Not *wholly*, since a man cannot pick for a partner a pretty but empty doll, and blame the consequences on God. "Luck" with children, of course, depends partly upon this choice of a partner, and partly upon wisdom in rearing. Forgive me for believing that Helen has been "well brought up." Neither my wife nor I ever said, "Don't do that," but my wife, at least, earned her daughter's love and respect, so, up to date, Helen has never done what she thought might displease and be unworthy of her mother.

Otherwise, as I said in *The Fool*, luck is work. Looking over my shoulder, I realize that I have been happy chiefly because I have been busy, and because my particular work has been satisfying and absorbing. Too much so, perhaps. Honest confession being good for the soul, I admit that I've never been absorbed in anything *but* my work. Deep sorrows, such as my mother's death, have been drowned in it. At my desk, I can put aside almost any grief or grievance in ten minutes. When I was a lad, and in love most of the time, my mother observed that the most desperate passions did not interfere with my writing, and my wife, vastly amused at my continued fondness for the opposite sex, warns my women friends that no friendship has survived its serious interruption of the tasks set myself.

It is a driving force and far from being an unmitigated blessing, this obsession with one's job. If reading this book you have sometimes thought me mercenary, I have failed to make myself clear. As stated so often, I have regarded money as a by-product, a means of assuring freedom to and for work, and, in some degree, a measure of the work's value. As J. B. Pond told me, "You're not sure you can do anything until you find whether people will pay you for it." Nothing is more futile than vague idealism, and the biggest men must be those who have their heads in the stars and their feet on the ground. I lack the kind of conceit—or self-confidence, if you will—that enables me to be satisfied with writing that no one else likes or wants, and I lack faith in that type of self-satisfaction. If reading this, you have *not* felt me to be lacking in conceit, I beg

you to make a distinction between what a man thinks of himself and what he thinks of his product. It is quite possible to regard your story or play as impersonally as the corn you have grown or canned. I believe I am honest in saying I have never regarded myself, or what happens to me, as important; only my work is that.

So, too, I believe that I have been far more concerned with the work than with its reward. My best work and, curiously, that which has proved to be most profitable, has been done without hope of reward. Which emphatically does not mean that I have been disinclined to take the reward when it came, and as much of it as I could get. I have given my best to every job I ever undertook, whether I should have undertaken it or not. Finally, in this perhaps too friendly estimate of myself and my motives, I doubt that I have ever been ambitious in the sense of wanting to get ahead. I have enjoyed the struggle and driven ahead regardless of consequences and unmindful of possible failure. My hardest fights have been in causes I thought hopeless, and when they proved otherwise, I have been almost as astonished at victory as I should have been at defeat. If this seems paradoxical, I may add that I know I can't swim five miles, but if I started out to swim five miles I should be simply amazed if I didn't make it.

An important reason for my happiness is that I found myself early in life. I knew what I wanted and went out to get it. From the beginning I have had few doubts and wasted little time on non-essentials. I have not expected too much of people or of life. Maugham insists our greatest mistake is expecting of people more than they can give, and a man is a fool to be disappointed because "life isn't all beer and skittles." A wise man learns to take things as they come and, as I have written elsewhere, to divide his associates into first class, second class and steerage. Sometimes one consigns a first-class passenger to the steerage, or brings a steerage passenger into the first class, but one doesn't drop the passengers overboard or go into a decline because a steerage passenger behaves like a steerage passenger.

My best fortune, perhaps, has been a congenital disposition to regard what I have as the best of its kind, and to take little interest in what the other fellow has. My cottage is a palace and my wife a



queen, and I wouldn't have exchanged them for the Biltmore or Cleopatra. Long living has convinced me that kindness is chief of the virtues and injustice the most intolerable vice. I can forgive almost anything but unkindness, and I have fought with all my strength, not because this or that affected me, but because I hate even abstract injustice.

So much for self-portraiture. I could go on with a long list of my frailties and perversities, but to what purpose? If you have been interested in my work and my account of it, you probably have discovered these for yourself, and if you *haven't* been interested why should I bore you further? The truth, I suppose, is that I have written this chapter chiefly because it interests *me*. (Which has been the reason for much better writing, if not for all good writing.) The last page of a ledger may well be devoted to stock-taking.

At sixty-two I find myself with a curious sense of being at the beginning of a career. All that has gone before seems merely preliminary. Lacking the conviction of genius that was the motive power of my boyhood, I have, as a driving substitute, the conviction of usefulness and a job to be done. I have learned my trade, and learn more of it every day. Losing none of the enthusiasm and, I think, none of the imagination of youth, I have gained the rewards of age—balance and tolerance and maturity of judgment and understanding of my fellowmen. No one now has the financial security for which I, and they, struggled so long and at such cost, but its absence has ceased to frighten me, since instead I have the assurance of more dependable security within myself—the capacity that is the only real security. In his last years, Daniel Frohman spoke frequently of “sitting calmly on the shore and watching the rushing waters go by.” I have no wish to do that, but I have discovered the detachment that comes of years, the ability to *do battle calmly*, without fear of the outcome.

This account, therefore, is not a valedictory, but only a milestone. Unless we lose this war—and I don't believe we shall—you may expect Volume II about 1960. I hope *that* may be a record of more important work, better done. I hope I shall be as rich in friends then as now, living under the same roof, in much the same way, and with the same wife and daughter. I hope I shall still be-

lieve in my fellowmen and still see the sentiment and romance and glory about me. As I wrote in *The Adventures of a Happy Man*, "When I come to the end, I want to be able to tell myself, 'With the days that I had, and the strength that I had, I have done what I could. When the pyramid is finished, my grain of sand will be part of it.' " Because millions of us have felt and will feel that urge, "we shall march on to that complete justice, wisdom and kindness which are essential to a genuinely human race of men."

Late in 1932, just before a lecture in St. Louis University, I met a girl who was playing the young beloved in my *The House Beautiful*. She recalled to me that her father had played the young lover in my first production, and, with that in mind, and the thought that, like Tennyson's brook, "I go on forever," I finished my speech to six hundred black-robed students for priesthood in the Jesuit Brotherhood. There was applause, and addressing me in the presence of the class, the president of the University urged, "Promise us that you'll come again."

With Tennyson's brook deep in my consciousness, I said to the six hundred Jesuits, "Don't worry; I'll be back here some day talking to your children."

Three score and so what? I see no reason to doubt that I shall be "talking to *your* children"!

THE END



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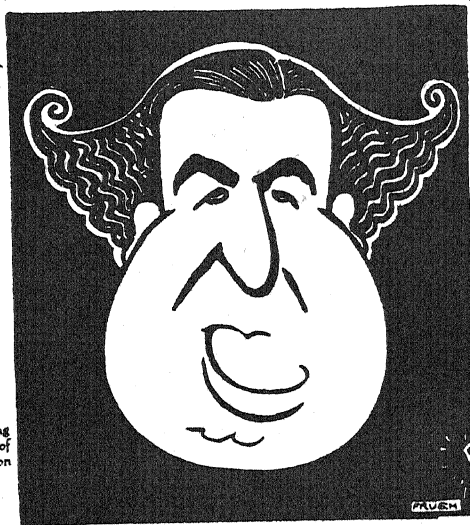




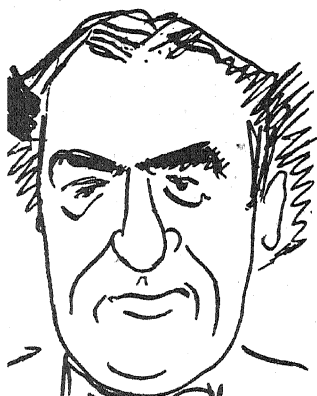
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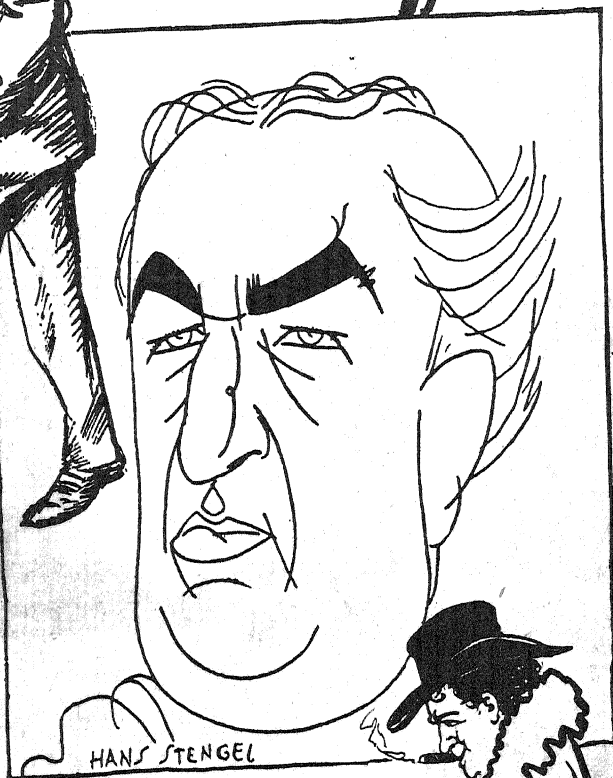
We caught Channing Pollock in the act of squandering royalties on an ice cream soda.



Channing Pollock about to review a Schubert play.



To Channing Pollock  
our latest and  
greatest actor  
First N.Y. Appearance  
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